

# **Karl MARX & Frederick ENGELS on LITERATURE and ART**

**A selection of writings edited by Lee Baxandall and Stefan Morawski, with an Introduction by Stefan Morawski. Revised edition, with supplementary notes, index and a new Introduction, "A Short History of Marxist Aesthetics", by Macdonald Daly.**

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**Documents on Marxist Aesthetics 1**

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*Karl Marx and Frederick Engels on Literature and Art*

A selection of writings edited by Lee Baxandall and Stefan Morawski, with an Introduction by Stefan Morawski. Revised edition, with supplementary notes, index and a new Introduction, "A Short History of Marxist Aesthetics", by Macdonald Daly.

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# A Short History of Marxist Aesthetics

## Macdonald Daly

### I

In 1971, Fredric Jameson, possibly the most influential Marxist critic of the late twentieth century, recommended "a relatively Hegelian kind of Marxism" to the literary critical world. Those only partly acquainted with Marxism might have been forgiven for wondering why a political and philosophical doctrine which had so long prided itself on "overcoming" Hegel, on having turned Hegel on his head, on having morphed Hegel's idealist dialectic into the apparently quite contrasting doctrine of historical materialism, was itself seemingly being cast back into the politically conservative swamp from which it usually claimed to have rescued not only German philosophy but the entire modern world. Jameson dated the emergence of Hegelian Marxism to a short period of about fifteen years, the pertinent milestones being, in the German speaking world, "Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness* in 1923, along with the rediscovery of Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*" and, in France, "the Hegel revival there during the late thirties".<sup>1</sup> He did not need to be explicit that this was also the definitive period of developing anti-Stalinist revulsion in Western Europe. Our speculative reader may legitimately have surmised from Jameson that the fledgling Marxist criticism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which had taken its stand on Marx's own oft-repeated sense that Hegelianism was a political dead end, was now itself ironically considered to have been a grand tour down a most disappointing methodological *cul-de-sac*.

Indeed, Jameson has seldom had anything to say on most of the neglected figures of the nineteenth century, like Franz Mehring, William Morris, Antonio Labriola, and Georgi Plekhanov.<sup>2</sup> But the reader more familiar with Marxist modes of argumentation would have little problem with the proposition that a thing can turn into its opposite, or that a negation can be negated, without any return to the *status quo ante* being effected. Dialectical deftness is the stock-in-trade of Hegelianism and Marxism alike. The young pre-Marxist Marx, in a note appended to his doctoral thesis of 1841, in which he clearly had Hegel in mind, already had a definite grasp of the method:

<sup>1</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. ix.

<sup>2</sup> All of them are likewise ignored by as influential and as recent a selection as Terry Eagleton and Drew Milne (eds.), *Marxist Literary Theory: a Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), which presents selections from Marx and Engels and thence leaps boldly ahead to Lenin without even a further nod at the nineteenth century.

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It is conceivable that a philosopher should be guilty of this or that inconsistency because of this or that compromise; he may himself be conscious of it. But what he is not conscious of is that in the last analysis this apparent compromise is made possible by the deficiency of his principles or an inadequate grasp of them. So if a philosopher really has compromised it is the job of his followers to use the inner core of his thought to illuminate his own superficial expressions of it. In this way, what is a progress in conscience is also a progress in knowledge. This does not involve putting the conscience of a philosopher under suspicion, but rather construing the essential characteristics of his views, giving them a definite form and meaning, and thus at the same time going beyond them.<sup>3</sup>

It is with reference to this description of the proper relation between a philosopher and his followers that one might appropriately assess critics in the period after Marx's death who attempted to elaborate and/or practise a Marxist aesthetics. Did they, as Marx put it, "use the inner core of his thought to illuminate his own superficial expressions of it" in the aesthetic field? Or, as the relative silence of Jameson and many other commentators concerning them perhaps suggests, did they fail in this task? And if they failed, did any do so less ingloriously than others?

## II

We must first of all, then, uncover the "inner core" of Marx's thinking with respect to art and literature, a task which virtually all who are fit to comment have acknowledged as difficult on account of the very "superficial expressions" of it which Marx left, not to mention the scattered textual locations in which they arise. There is, to be sure, the ultimate gift horse Marx gave us, namely his "Preface" to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), in which he explicitly includes the "aesthetic" in his list of examples of "ideological forms" comprising the "superstructure" of society (for the text of the passage, see p. 67, below). It has seldom been noted how repetitious this passage is. Marx hardly builds an elaborate or complex argument here: rather, he reiterates a central idea in varied phrasing in a manner typical of someone intent on persuading a reader of a novel notion (for Hegelians an heretical notion). The same three-element

<sup>3</sup> David McLellan (ed.), *Karl Marx: Selected Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 13.

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relation, encapsulated in really quite simple subject-verb-object expressions, is simply described in three different ways: (1) [subject] the *economic structure of society* or the *mode of production of material life* or *social being* (2) [verb] *gives rise to*, *conditions* or *determines* (3) [object] the *legal and political superstructure*, the *social, political and intellectual life process in general*, or *consciousness*, respectively. In the English translation quoted, the three different formulations depict almost the same relation, being hardly at semantic variance with one another except in the verbs. But it is in the hazards of those verbs that markedly variant and incompatible versions of the relations between "base" and "superstructure" (and consequently between Marxism and art) have taken root.

The crucial three sentences read, in Marx's original, "Die Gesamtheit dieser Produktionsverhältnisse bildet die ökonomische Struktur der Gesellschaft, die reale Basis, worauf sich ein juristischer und politischer Überbau erhebt, und welcher bestimmte gesellschaftliche Bewusstseinformen entsprechen. Die Produktionsweise des materiellen Lebens bedingt den sozialen, politischen und geistigen Lebensprozess überhaupt. Es ist nicht das Bewusstsein der Menschen, das ihr Sein, sondern umgekehrt ihr gesellschaftliches Sein, das ihr Bewusstsein bestimmt."<sup>4</sup> The German verb "bedingen" in the second sentence is delicately nuanced: "bedingt" here could justifiably have been Englished (in ascending order of strength) as "presupposes", "conditions", "causes", "necessitates", or "determines", although many would argue that had Marx had the last in mind he would probably have reached for a stronger verb. The verb so translated, which he does use in the following sentence, is "bestimmen", which is even more varied in application: thus "bestimmt" could mean any of "modifies", "influences", "conditions", "decides", "defines", "designates", "fixes", "determines" or "predetermines". Now, there are clear differences of interconnectedness indicated by the causative verbs "gives rise to", "conditions" and "determines". The first defines a weak relation in which (a) simply creates the preconditions for (b); the second implies a stronger causative relation in which (a) influences or sets limits to the form of (b); the third might imply that (a) is the thoroughly controlling and moving force behind or within (b). If, for heuristic purposes, one leaves aside the complex social phenomena which Marx is actually describing, and replaces them with simpler correlates, as Marx himself does with the example of (a) "an individual" and (b) "what he thinks of himself", then the differences of interconnectedness are easier to appreciate. Take the

<sup>4</sup> Fritz J. Raddatz (ed.), *Marxismus und Literatur: eine Dokumentation in Drei Bänden* (Hamburg, Rowohlt, 1969), Vol. I, p. 152.

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alternative example of (a) a person's body and (b) a person's character. In this case, the first proposition is surely a universally acceptable one: it amounts to little more than a statement of the obvious, namely that to have a character one must possess a body. The second proposition would also probably pass without major disagreement: all that would be questioned is the degree to which character is affected by physiology. The third proposition, that character is controlled thoroughly and at all times by the operations of bodily reflexes, organs, genetic programming and so on, might gain the assent of certain neuroscientists and behaviourists, but is unlikely to meet with the approval of too many others, scientists included, not least because it seems to render the very concept of "character" (if it is merely an epiphenomenon) worthless: all talk of character can simply be reduced to physical terms in such a case.

Depending on the chosen inflections, then, the passage can be used to imply either: (1) a strongly deterministic theory in which art is seen as being wholly preordained by the economic context within which it is produced or consumed—in fact is virtually reducible to it—and thus plays a negligible rôle in "real" historical processes; or (2) a theory in which, although ultimately dependent on and influenced by economic forces, art has a variable freedom (or "relative autonomy") from the economic system within which it arises, to the extent that it cannot be explained only by reference to the system, and indeed may even influence its course, for example by promoting ideas, emotions or actions which amount to an intervention in the prevailing economic order (either to change or to uphold it).

It is obviously conceivable that one may concur with position (1) and deny that art has any social value or importance beyond the merely aesthetic, spiritual or ideological satisfactions it may in itself give: many art-for-art's-sake writers and readers have done so. It is also possible to deny (1) entirely from a somewhat different but paradoxically related position: thus the banning of Joyce's *Ulysses*, the persecution of Soviet literary dissidents, or the *fatwa* pronounced against Salman Rushdie after the publication of *The Satanic Verses*, may all be used demonstrate the social change which those in authority perceive literature to be supremely capable of bringing about. Yet both views share idealist assumptions which are anathema to Marxism, and it is therefore unlikely that Marx, though himself a passionate *litteratus*, would have espoused either. The likelihood is that he did not consider so many writers and readers (or governments and censors) to have been wildly deluded in adjudging literature to be potentially a *somewhat* influential factor in social and historical development. Unfortunately, unlike his great antagonist Hegel (the combat with whom probably provoked the starkly differentiating formulations of

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the quoted Preface), Marx did not leave any substantial material on aesthetic questions from which we can draw unified conclusions. His comments and reflections on such matters were so incidental, brief and scattered that they offer little ultimately to make his theoretical stance on the aesthetic unambiguously clear. Nonetheless, virtually all subsequent artistic and critical work of a Marxist tinge has predictably assumed one or other variant of position (2).

So the passage is evidently an example of what the soon-to-be Dr Marx had already diagnosed as a "deficiency of [...] principles or an inadequate grasp of them" because the resulting propositions are not mutually compatible: to leave them open as variant possibilities is precisely a "compromise", here no doubt made for the sake of the non-idealist, anti-Hegelian emphasis which Marx felt was required at the moment. Marx himself never went "beyond" them, although the early Marx demonstrably believed the opposite. It is worth recalling that the man who wrote, "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness" had two decades earlier "criticised Democritus' strict determinism and came out in favour of Epicurus' position of freedom of man's consciousness to change his surroundings".<sup>5</sup> The sheer number and extent of Marx's casual and formal comments on art and literature, the pleasure he took in them and the value they obviously possessed for him, give the lie to any charge of philistine dismissal of the aesthetic or its importance. But only a decade previously, in *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848), he could write, "Does it require deep intuition to comprehend that man's ideas, views and conceptions, in one word, man's consciousness, changes with every change in the conditions of his material existence, in his social relations and in his social life? What else does the history of ideas prove, than that intellectual production changes its character in proportion as material production is changed?" (p. 57, below). Earlier still, *The German Ideology* (1846), a text written jointly with Engels which from the very first page is a bold, lacerating and unrelenting attack on Hegel and his contemporary followers, is replete with formulations which seem to vacillate between the uncompromisingly "deterministic" and pliantly "conditional" versions of base/superstructure relations, but ultimately veer towards the former: "The phantoms formed in the brains of men are also, necessarily, sublimates of their material life-process, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises. Morality, religion, metaphysics, and all the rest of

<sup>5</sup> David McLellan, *The Thought of Karl Marx*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1979), p. 7.

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ideology as well as the forms of consciousness corresponding to these, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence.” But the same text also continually stresses that this is not how humans *live* their relation to the world: on the contrary, they seem always and everywhere to have acted as if the reverse were true, imagining that the moving principle of the world really is thought: “If in all ideology men and their relations appear upside-down as in a *camera obscura*, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life process.”<sup>6</sup> Writing in 1852, in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*, he could still say, “Upon the different forms of property, upon the social conditions of existence, rises an entire superstructure of distinct and peculiarly formed sentiments, illusions, modes of thought, and views of life. The entire class creates and forms them out of its material foundations and out of the corresponding social relations.”<sup>7</sup> But it did not fail to dawn on Marx that these apparent illusions were socially *produced* (always a key concept for him) and socially potent. “Production not only provides the material to satisfy a need,” he wrote in the late 1850s, “it also provides the need for the material. [...] An *objet d’art* creates a public that has artistic taste and is able to enjoy beauty”.<sup>8</sup> But if the appetite for beauty can become a *need*, akin to appetites more traditionally conceived of as physical, where does the material end and the non-material begin? There is no linear development in these sometimes contradictory, sometimes complementary thoughts. Variations on these themes, unpredictably inflected towards or between the various versions of the base/superstructure motif, can emerge at different points in Marx’s *oeuvre* with something approaching randomness. As early as 1844 he could ferociously satirise capitalism’s denial of the enjoyment of luxury, its imperative to save rather than spend, as one of its morally worst features, and in doing so he notably made no distinction between “material” and “non-material” activities: “The less you eat, drink and read books; the less you go to the theatre, the dance hall, the public-house; the less you think, love, theorize, sing, paint, fence, etc., the more you *save*—the *greater* becomes your treasure which neither moths nor dust will devour—your *capital*” (pp. 50-51, below).

It is important to note that the few texts in which we find Marx attempting to work out the implications of his theory of determination for

<sup>6</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *On Literature and Art* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), p. 43.

<sup>7</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1979), Vol. XI, p. 128.

<sup>8</sup> Marx and Engels, *On Literature and Art*, p. 129.



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specific forms of art show that he was in difficulty. Above all, there is the famous (or notorious) 1857 draft of the *Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy* (which was not published until 1903), in which he embarks upon a disquisition concerning the long-lasting appeal of ancient art stimulated by questions such as, "Is the view of nature and of social relations which shaped Greek imagination and thus Greek [mythology] possible in the age of automatic machinery and railways and locomotives and electric telegraphs?" (p. 108, below). His answer to the conundrum of the ongoing social value of Greek art was a desperately bad stab at answering a good question, but more important than its bathos is the fact that Marx's response reverts to categories which are entirely non-Marxist. This may be one reason why he chose not to publish the draft. However, the least satisfactory response to the shortcomings of Marx's thinking on these matters is to wave aside his inadequately worked out positions as merely nugatory. Marx was too influential a thinker for the tradition of aesthetic criticism he inspired to be ignored in this way. He himself, as we have already seen, described a more intellectually effective procedure. Did his followers attempt to construe "the essential characteristics of his views, giving them a definite form and meaning, and thus at the same time going beyond them"? It is certainly possible, at this distance, to identify the "inner core" of Marx's thought with respect to aesthetics. This essentially posits the truth that the human capacity to produce art is dependent on an economic system in which such production (and its consumption) is made possible, that art itself is a "secondary" phenomenon which bears the ineradicable traces or marks of its economic dependency (and is thus highly historically variable), but that it also creates new needs which themselves lead to the diversification of artistic products and thus (logically) would seem to intervene in the "primary" economic system. One might paraphrase Marx's thinking along these lines as prompting a number of questions which he himself is unable to answer but which provided a working agenda for his followers. Among these questions might be the following: *in what specific ways* do economic conditions "influence" the production of art in concrete cases?; *how much* is art influenced by economic conditions?; is there any way in which art can be said to be *relatively free* of such influence?; if so, can some arts, or some aesthetic texts, be said to be *more or less free* than others?; if not, is art, in the final analysis, *reducible* to economic categories?; or is it possible that the influence might also work in *reverse*, art precipitating modifications in economic life?

III

Some of these questions were tackled while Marx himself was still alive, but not by Marx. It is little acknowledged that it is Marx's friend and collaborator, Engels—most often thought of as the populariser or editor of the former's work—who is responsible for what today are understood to be the main aesthetic emphases of "classic Marxism" (a judgment which might have surprised Engels himself and with which the original editors of this volume may disagree). A glance at the selection in this anthology shows that it was Engels rather than Marx who tended to offer detail, exemplary cases and quasi-theoretical elaboration. He not only supplemented Marx's general reflections on art, but considerably enlarged upon them, and even introduced quite new emphases and lines of thought. This is nowhere more patent than in his espousal of Realism as his preferred aesthetic form. According to Stefan Morawski, "The word 'realism' does not appear in any text by Marx" (p. 25, below). Later Marxist aestheticians' preoccupation with Realism, which can be found as late as Georg Lukács and Raymond Williams, is almost entirely due to Engels. In its earliest emergence in his writing, this concern seems driven by the fact that the "reality" depicted by certain works of art coincides happily with Marx's historical materialist theory of "the real foundation", or, even more pedestrianly, with the mere practical necessities of spreading the socialist message. In 1844, for example, Engels articulated his enthusiasm for a contemporary painting by Karl Hübner, "The Silesian Weavers", which he praised in terms that referred to little other than its politically emotive content and its consequent efficacy as a piece of propaganda: it "made a more effectual Socialist agitation than a hundred pamphlets might have done" (p. 81, below). But the very fact that Engels even saw fit to hail a painting as a notable contribution to the early progress of the Socialist movement is eloquent testimony to his sense of art's social importance.

Engels soon overcame (if indeed he ever held) the simple belief that the merit of a work of art is merely an index of the effectiveness with which it encapsulates a socialist politics, and this is why it would be unfair to lay the responsibility for the later Stalinist grotesqueness of the doctrine of "Socialist Realism" at his door. It is in his correspondence, not Marx's, that we first encounter a perspective on Realism which acknowledges it both as a set of aesthetic conventions and as a social form with especial resonance for Marxism. In April 1888, in a draft letter to responding to the author of a novel of working class life (pp. 90-92, below), he famously announced, "Realism, to my mind, implies, besides truth of detail, the truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances",

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and criticised the work because it had failed to meet the criteria of circumstantial typicality, in that it omitted to depict the working class as much more than a passive mass. It would be easy to dismiss the seemingly sweeping account of a large corpus of fiction which follows as a product of Engels' highly politicised subjectivity, but to do so would fail to attend to its remarkable originality. We may now be used to authorial class allegiance, ideological tendency, and unconscious motivation as they can be found to operate in literary texts, but no one, before Engels, was prepared to articulate their putative effect *and* simultaneously establish a political dimension for evaluation of the aesthetic results. Moreover, Balzac's work is here appropriated for Marxism in a way that vitally undermines the vulgar Marxist notion that art be produced to a political prescription and its evaluation firmly subordinated to socialist ends. We may distinguish four implicit, associated points: first, literary writing is not an "opinionated" discourse and cannot be evaluated by the same standards as, for example, a political polemic; second, this is not to say that art is non-ideological, but that it is not (or should not be) *expressly* so; third, the ideological nature of an art work cannot be equated with the (conscious) ideology of the artist, and indeed may be in conflict with it; and, fourth, it therefore follows that classical or bourgeois art cannot simply be dismissed on the assumption that it is ideologically reactionary. The fact that these points raise further questions which are not answered by Engels only demonstrates how they enlarge the scope of Marxist enquiry into art, its evaluation, and its functions. What stance should a Marxist critic take on classical or bourgeois works of art that cannot be read "against the grain" in the way that he reads Balzac? If analysis shows that the work is indeed reactionary, in however subtly tangential and aesthetically pleasing a manner, should Marxist critics thereafter simply wash their hands of it? Or should they embark on a critique of its content while praising its form? In short, how much is Marxist theory willing to separate the aesthetic value of a work of art from its ideological outlook? Just as Engels' comments on Balzac initiated a search for solutions to these problems, so too did they encourage speculation as to the issue of Realism and its relation to Marxist "reality". It is clear from his closing remarks that Engels is praising the Realist mode in which he chose to write as much as he is praising Balzac himself. One cannot imagine, for example, a symbolist or a surrealist method being used to produce a "chronicle-fashion" history of society of a kind which might attract equivalent approbation from Engels. But does this amount to the proposition that Marxism privileges Realism above other artistic modes? Is aesthetic verisimilitude the inevitable correlative of Marx's conceptualisation of "reality"? Is it thus inherently "progressive" and are

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other representational modes inherently conservative?

Marx had died in 1883. It is arguable that, in the twelve years remaining to him, Engels did considerably more than popularise the pre-existing conceptual and textual legacy Marx had bequeathed. There was one huge practical task—the preparation for publication of the third volume of *Capital*—which may have enforced a new boldness. The manuscript Marx left was an organisational nightmare and Engels had difficulty even reading Marx's handwriting. The monumental work would never have appeared without Engels taking his own decisions as to its requisite shape and form. As the surviving member of the partnership and keeper of the flame Engels was, moreover, looked to by increasing numbers of younger Marxist intellectuals as the greatest living authority on the doctrine, and this gave him the privilege of being permitted to amplify its silences and smooth its rough edges. This did not occur when he and Marx worked alongside one another. A unique moment in intellectual history occurred in 1859, when, within a month of each other, Marx and Engels both wrote separate letters to Ferdinand Lassalle, each adversely criticising with identically insincere courtesy Lassalle's recently published drama, *Franz von Sickingen* (pp. 83-9, 112-114, below). Each letter represents the closest reading of a single literary text Marx and Engels seem ever to have committed to paper, but their content and tone are so similar that it is hard to distinguish one from the other. Marx wrote several times to Engels in the intervening month, during which one suspects Engels became aware of and consciously echoed what he knew Marx already to have written.<sup>9</sup>

How different things were when Engels found himself by default to be the (intestate) Marx's intellectual heir. Called upon to act as as Marx's editor, executor and exegete, he did not hesitate to reconfigure Marx's concepts in the light of new political and economic circumstances, most important of all the rise of social democracy in Germany. His most profound innovation was the concept of mediation, promulgated in a letter to Franz Mehring in July 1893 (pp. 77-9, below). An analysis which demonstrates "mediation" is one which traces "false" ideological consciousness to its "true" source in material interests, but does so without denying the social effectivity of ideology. With regard to art, the case has since regularly been made that aesthetic productions are important purveyors of ideological concepts and values. Marx himself was fond of showing that Shakespeare was radically insightful with regard to the relations between material interests and ideology, famously citing in *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* the "Gold? Yellow,

<sup>9</sup> Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. XL, pp. 418-46.

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glittering, precious gold?" soliloquy from *Timon of Athens* to show how "Shakespeare excellently depicts the real nature of *money*",<sup>10</sup> its ability to make real what can otherwise only be imagined, but also its capacity to transform, dictate or determine ideological consciousness. Engels' outline theory of mediation, then, would seem similarly to encourage analysis (or critiques) of conservative artistic works as ideological constructions producing "false consciousness". The analysis or critique would presumably show how this "false consciousness" is a mediation of "true" material interests, and demonstrate and evaluate (perhaps condemn) the degree of historical effectivity of such works. Conversely, "radical" art would by implication tend to expose the material sources in which all ideological consciousness is rooted, thus producing a "true" (in Marxist terms, non-ideological or scientific) picture of the world. This proposed application of Engels' sketchy theory is obviously tendentious, not least in its suggestion that not all art, but only conservative art, is ideological. But it is a significant advance on a fairly rudimentary "reflection" theory (in which art [in the superstructure] merely *reflects* history [the base]) to a more sophisticated "mediation" theory (in which art *both reflects and has the capacity to alter* history). However limited or crude such nascent insights may seem now, they give Engels an important place in Marxist literary critical thought: in the aesthetic field at least, it was he who rendered the Marxist analytic method dialectical. "Mediation" was to remain a key concept for Marxists until as recently as Louis Althusser.

## IV

We should, however, pause at this point to note that Marxism is, in at least one respect, very unlike a number of other critical theories. A critic does not "work with" it the way a structuralist "works with" structuralism or a deconstructionist with deconstruction, nor does a creative writer employ it the way a Surrealist may turn to automatic writing or a sonneteer choose between Petrarchan, Shakespearean or Spenserian models. Unlike certain other -isms, Marxism is not merely an intellectual method and even less an artistic technique. To "use" it or "work with" it is inevitably to subordinate one's work to, or at least to integrate it with, the political commitments which Marxism implies in a particular instance or the system of ideological beliefs it propounds in general, or both, with the intention that these shall be furthered in the world outside the text. This

<sup>10</sup> Marx and Engels, *On Literature and Art*, p. 136.

truth remains undeniable despite the prescriptivist atrocities (the obvious example being the Stalinist doctrine of Socialist Realism) which are the outcome of ultra-dogmatic interpretations of it. Marxist writers or critics are not Marxists unless they are in one way or another demonstrably partisan in favour of a particular kind of socialism. In this respect alone they have more in common with, for example, avowedly Christian writers and critics than they do with *avant-garde* concrete poets or semioticians decoding the commodity branding strategies within advertisements. The poet and the semiotician may well be Marxists, but not by virtue of their technique or their object of analysis. Nor does partisanship on its own—in the form, say, of a generalised sympathy with the downtrodden, poor and oppressed, or in the expression of a wish that the social world ought to be more equitable, just and fair—mark the Marxist. A grasp of the more systematic and philosophical dimensions of the Marxist critique of capitalism, and an understanding of what this critique requires by way of *praxis* in any “real world” conjuncture, would both need to be seen before one might consider the textual producer Marxist. Many *soi-disant* Marxist English poets of the 1930s, for example, lacked the former; a number of “armchair Marxist” critics are likewise rather deficient when it comes to the latter. (These observations imply nothing, one should insist, about the aesthetic value of their poetry or the intellectual worth of their criticism respectively.) In short, there are arguably no “Marxist” texts at all, in the sense that Marxism always implies an additional interventionist orientation, along certain ideological lines but varying in respect of the specific nature of any historical moment, to the “real” world of contingent social relations, conflicting economic interests, and uneven distribution of power which lies outside any text. But such texts may well be part of a wider social project which is identifiably Marxist.

Terry Eagleton has proposed a useful charting of four broad “regions” in the history of Marxist criticism.<sup>11</sup> The terms he uses to designate these currents of enquiry are “anthropological”, “political”, “ideological” and “economic”. With the exception of the last, which is not summarised here in any detail (it describes the field traditionally known as “the sociology of literature”, containing relatively circumscribed studies of the economic and legal context in which literature is socially distributed and consumed), Eagleton’s categories are largely chronological phases.<sup>12</sup> The “anthropological” perspective within Marxist criticism is that to which

<sup>11</sup> Eagleton and Milne, *Marxist Literary Theory*, pp. 7-14.

<sup>12</sup> For a comparable three-phase categorisation, see Francis Mulhern, “Introduction”, *Contemporary Marxist Literary Criticism*, ed. Francis Mulhern (Harlow: Longman, 1992), pp. 3-17.



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Marx's own occasional reflections frequently belong, in that they often try to define art in relation to the functions it fulfils within what Marx termed the "species being" of humanity, or what more traditional thinkers may envisage to be "human nature". The questions addressed within this tradition seldom attract the contentious and tendentious political discourse which constitutes the common badge of Marxist debate, concerned as they are with fundamental issues: "What is the function of art within social evolution? What are the material and biological bases of 'aesthetic' capacities? What are the relations between art and human labour? How does art relate to myth, ritual, religion and language, and what are its social functions?"<sup>13</sup> Such enquiries are common from the middle of the nineteenth to the end of the first third of the twentieth century, in works by writers such as Morris, Labriola, Mehring, Kautsky and Plekhanov, the five immediate post-Marx/Engels figures anthologised in Solomon's voluminous anthology.<sup>14</sup> This strand within aesthetic Marxism virtually dries up with Christopher Caudwell's *Illusion and Reality* (1937), although it enjoys its last post-war gasps of vitality in George Thomson's two studies in ancient Greek society, *The Prehistoric Aegean* (1954) and *The First Philosophers* (1955), and in Ernst Fischer's *The Necessity of Art* (1959). As Eagleton points out, the transhistorical nature of the "anthropological" perspective contrasts markedly with subsequent developments in Marxist criticism, which has tended to place artistic works within more precise, and indeed ever increasingly specific and localised, historical moments (usually of their production or, less frequently, their consumption), implicitly laying much greater stress on historical contingency and change than persistence and continuity. No doubt the positivist scholarly bent of the "anthropological" approach made it difficult to sustain in the twentieth century, when there were titanic issues of contemporary global politics which could clearly not, furthermore, be met by its agenda.

## V

The first sustained volume-length study in Marxist aesthetics was Franz Mehring's *The Lessing Legend* (1893). Originally a series of journal articles, this began as a rebuttal to a particularly tendentious study of

<sup>13</sup> Eagleton and Milne, *Marxist Literary Theory*, p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> Maynard Solomon (ed.), *Marxism and Art: Essays Classic and Contemporary* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1979).

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Lessing by the bourgeois critic Eric Schmidt, but grew into a spirited attack against an entire phalanx of German literary historians who linked the German literary renaissance of the eighteenth century to the rise of Prussia, thus associating the reign of the absolutist Frederick II and the birth of classical German literature. Engels' letter to Mehring of July 1893 (cited above, p. x) was primarily written to thank Mehring for having sent the book, which he had already told Karl Kautsky he considered "first-rate",<sup>15</sup> but as Engels' compliments to Mehring demonstrate, he considered the book's value to lie in its historical rather than its aesthetic analysis, as have most other commentators. To this day *The Lessing Legend* has been translated into English only in a radically abbreviated form, which has itself been long out of print, and consequently Mehring remains a literary critic whose reputation has made little impact on the anglophone world.<sup>16</sup> This is a sad fact, given his prodigious, incessant and highly scholarly activity. As Maynard Solomon notes,

Mehring wrote on virtually every major figure in German classical literature. There are essays on Winckelmann, Klopstock, Lessing, Herder, Goethe, Kleist, Büchner, Freiligrath, Weerth, Hebbel, Grillparzer, Hofmannsthal, a life of Schiller, a brief biography of Heine; of the non-German authors, he dealt with Cervantes, Rabelais, Molière, Zola, Sue, Byron, Ibsen, Tolstoy, Gorki, and numerous others. Generally, the intention of most of these essays was to bring the classics of literature within the understanding of the working class. (On his seventieth birthday, Rosa Luxemburg wrote to him: "Thanks to your books and articles the German proletariat has been brought into close touch not only with classic German philosophy, but also with classic German literature.")<sup>17</sup>

As we shall see, Mehring's association with Luxemburg proved to be his historical undoing at the hands of Stalin.

Mehring came to Marxism later than most, in his forties, with his aesthetic perspective already somewhat fully formed and fully Kantian,

<sup>15</sup> Marx and Engels, *On Literature and Art*, p. 64.

<sup>16</sup> Franz Mehring, *The Lessing Legend*, trans. A. S. Grogan (New York: Critics Group Press, 1938). Very little of Mehring's work (other than his epoch-making biography of Marx, published in English in 1936) is available in English. This may be the appropriate point to note that Marxist writers of this period have, however, been astonishingly well-served by the internet generation: Mehring is only one of the many Marxist writers rescued from almost complete oblivion, for example, by the extraordinary site [www.marxists.org](http://www.marxists.org).

<sup>17</sup> Solomon, *Marxism and Art*, p. 100.

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which, to say the least, would seem *prima facie* to pose a considerable idealist problem for a Marxist. (Indeed, there is a history of Marxist aesthetics waiting to be written along the lines that the principal advances in the field came from those, from Walter Benjamin to Jean-Paul Sartre to Raymond Williams, who came to Marxism from an idealist humanist background which they stubbornly refused fully to renounce.) Far from recanting his Kantian past, Mehring set about adroitly attempting to fuse the Marxist theory of ideology with Kantian (and Schillerian) aesthetics. For example, in one of the best known of his "Aesthetic Ramblings" (a regular column he contributed to the journal *Die Neue Zeit*, edited by Kautsky, in 1898-99), he resynthesised the Kantian theory of aesthetic judgment from a materialist point of view.<sup>18</sup> In so doing, he was the first to imply that Marxism had inherited a great deal from classical German aesthetics in particular as well as classical German philosophy in general. It took half a century for this emphasis to be taken up again by Herbert Marcuse and, ironically, the man who was to do Mehring's reputation most damage, Lukács (on which more in due course).

It is surprising, given the fact that Marx and Engels spent most of the later parts of their lives in London, that only William Morris, in this period and from this quarter, made a noteworthy and lasting contribution to Marxist aesthetics. (The temptation to include in this survey that even more famous frequenter of London Marxist circles—George Bernard Shaw—has been resisted. Shaw's early commitment to Marxism is indisputable, but it was decidedly on the wane from 1884, when he joined the Fabians and, predictably, took a socialist path that was, by definition, rather lukewarm towards Marxism. Most of his creative and critical work postdated this conversion and did not appreciably contribute to Marxist aesthetics strictly conceived.)<sup>19</sup> Morris's unique utopian concerns and emphases take us back, as no other critic of the period does, to the influence on the early Marx of Fourier and Feuerbach. The following passage, for example, from the text of a lecture, "Art Under Plutocracy", originally delivered in the University of Oxford in November 1883, seems to bear all the marks of a writer who is familiar with Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*:

<sup>18</sup> The discussion can be found in Solomon. *Marxism and Art*, pp. 102-106.

<sup>19</sup> Readers interested in pursuing Shaw's politics and its place in his work are referred to Gareth Griffith. *Socialism and Superior Brains: the Political Thought of George Bernard Shaw* (London: Routledge, 1993). For the same reason a number of European initiatives which took place under the sign of anarchist socialism are not accounted for here: see, for example, Eugenia W. Herbert. *The Artist and Social Reform: France and Belgium 1885-1898* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961).

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[...] art is founded on what I feel quite sure is a truth, and an important one, namely that all art, even the highest, is influenced by the conditions of labour of the mass of mankind, and that any pretensions which may be made for even the highest intellectual art to be independent of these general conditions are futile and vain; that is to say, that any art which professes to be founded on the special education or refinement of a limited body or class must of necessity be unreal and short-lived. Art is man's expression of his joy in labour. If those are not Professor Ruskin's words they embody at least his teaching on this subject. Nor has any truth more important ever been stated; for if pleasure in labour be generally possible, what a strange folly it must be for men to consent to labour without pleasure; and what a hideous injustice it must be for society to compel most men to labour without pleasure.<sup>20</sup>

But Morris could not possibly have known Marx's writings of 1844, which did not see the light of day in any form until 1927, and were not published in full until 1932. His Marxist textual influences seem principally to have been Marx's *Capital* and Engels' *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (the pamphlet which laid bare to a larger than usual audience the utopian influences on the early formation of Marxism), both of which he read in French translation in the 1880s. Morris probably arrived at this Marxist juncture via non-Marxist sources such as Ruskin (who chaired the meeting at which the words above were first spoken) and that great influence on Ruskin, Carlyle, who was in the main responsible for plugging the British of the nineteenth century into classical German aesthetics of the eighteenth.

It is difficult to imagine how novel it must have seemed, in the industrial English Midlands of January 1884, to attend a lecture at the Leicester Secular Society (later published as "Art and Socialism", Morris's best known essay), and hear Morris open with the words, "My friends, I want you to look into the relations of Art to Commerce": note the "you", which turns what would otherwise be a statement of intent into an exhortation.<sup>21</sup> Morris's preference for addressing and encouraging his audiences to action, appearing in person before them, was a form of *praxis* all its own, and rather different from the mode of address of Marx, who usually preferred, when addressing popular audiences, to remain behind

<sup>20</sup> A. L. Morton (ed.), *Political Writings of William Morris* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1979), pp. 66-7.

<sup>21</sup> Morton, *Political writings of William Morris*, p. 109.

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the screen of the printed journalistic word. But what "Art and Socialism" does have in common with Marx, although seemingly worked out semi-independently, or by extrapolation from certain sections of *Capital*, is a sure grasp of the "alienated labour" thesis. What Morris does that is new is quite specifically to relate two apparently disparate practices, art and labour, in defence of the proposition that "the world of modern civilisation in its haste to gain a very inequitably divided material prosperity has entirely suppressed popular Art":

[...] the cause of this famine of Art is that whilst people work throughout the civilised world as laboriously as ever they did, they have lost—in losing an Art which was done by and for the people—the natural solace of that labour; a solace which they once had, and always should have, the opportunity of expressing their own thoughts to their fellows by means of that very labour, by means of that daily work which nature or long custom, a second nature, does indeed require of them, but without meaning that it should be an unrewarded and repulsive burden.<sup>22</sup>

Of course there is something quite idiosyncratic about this: Marx only very occasionally looked back to the Middle Ages as benignly as Morris habitually did, and Morris seemed incapable of convincingly explaining how the process of the eradication of popular art by commerce was to be reversed. In these respects Morris bumped into and did not go beyond the limits of the utopianism which Marx had had to leave behind long before. In his own diverse artistic practice, for which he is rightly better known than his essays on art, Morris often seemed simply to be trying to revive the practices of the feudal past. But the fact that he was not practised in the ways of the historical materialist dialectic is not sufficient reason for such a rich body of work to have such a limited audience today.

Morris's plentiful writings on art and its problematics within capitalism are one indication that, by the *fin de siècle*, Marxism, even in the aesthetic field, had started to spread far beyond German borders. Engels' initiative on "mediation", for example, was almost immediately taken up, probably in acknowledgment of Engels' direct encouragement of him, by Antonio Labriola, a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Rome, in *Essays in the Materialistic Conception of History*. This book, published in Italian in 1896, was quickly to enjoy pan-European influence, being translated into a number of languages by the end of the century, including a French

<sup>22</sup> Morton. *Political Writings of William Morris*, p. 110.

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edition introduced by Georges Sorel and read early by Lenin, who encouraged a Russian translation, which duly appeared in 1898. Trotsky too read the book in the 1890s. Labriola attempted to distinguish what might be considered "direct" ideological projections of economic facts (like politics and law) from "indirect" correspondences (like art and religion), claiming "that in artistic or religious production the mediation from the conditions to the products is very complicated";<sup>23</sup> warned against the reduction of the former to the latter; and drew attention to the fact that, despite all social organisation, humans remained fundamentally rooted in a physical nature which changed slowly enough to be considered a permanent fact: in this fact, by implication, might be the solution to Marx's conundrum as to the long-lasting appeal even of "outdated" art forms. Labriola moreover called for a social psychology which might explicate what he was confident enough to depict as a full-blown dialectical scenario: "forms of consciousness, even as they are determined by the conditions of life, constitute themselves also a part of history [...] there is no fact in history which is not preceded, accompanied and followed by determined forms of consciousness, whether it be superstitious or experimental, ingenious or reflective, impulsive or self-controlled, fantastic or reasoning".<sup>24</sup> Althusser was hardly the first to point out that Engels' famous "last instance", in which "the economic movement finally asserts itself" as the prime mover "amid all the endless host of accidents" of history, never came.<sup>25</sup>

Labriola did not engage directly with works of art or literature, but Georgi Plekhanov, who introduced him to a Russian audience by means of a critical essay published in September 1897,<sup>26</sup> certainly did. At this time Plekhanov, founder of the Russian Social-Democratic Party, was the theoretical leader of Russian communism, having not yet been eclipsed by Lenin, with whom he was to break in 1905 over their differences on armed insurrection. His major work, *Art and Social Life*, attempted to apply Marx's general theory, as adapted by Engels and Labriola, to specific works, and remained enormously influential, despite Plekhanov's dwindling political fortunes, well into the Stalinist era. Two of the main reasons for his sustained popularity, even after his death in 1918, were no doubt his fairly mechanical "reflection theory" (which seemed to return

<sup>23</sup> Antonio Labriola, *Essays in the Materialistic Conception of History*, trans. Charles H. Kerr (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1908), p. 217.

<sup>24</sup> Labriola, *Essays*, p. 113.

<sup>25</sup> Robert C. Tucker (ed.), *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1978), p. 760.

<sup>26</sup> Solomon, *Marxism and Art*, p. 92.



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art to a subsidiary role as a passive "reflector" of primary economic developments) and his hostility to literary and artistic experimentalism (Cubism in particular attracted his ire), both of which meant that he offered no threat to the Stalinist promotion of Socialist Realism and its counterpart, implacable opposition to Modernism.<sup>27</sup> The influence of *Art and Social Life* shows, however, that the centre of gravity of Marxist intellectual work had shifted from Germany even before the accommodation of German social democrats to the Great War definitively robbed them of any claim they may have had to be the natural inheritors of Marxist theory.<sup>28</sup>

## VI

Marx's nineteenth century heirs undoubtedly fleshed out his suggestive remarks on general aesthetic questions and attempted to show how they might accord with (or need to be adjusted to fit) his political and economic theories. In this respect their neglect is undue. They made a significantly lesser contribution to the analysis of specific works of art and literature, but the explanation for their omission from many narratives of Marxist aesthetics lies not in their empirical shortcomings but in a later historical development which engulfed them. By the end of the century the epicentre of all Marxist debate, including that around aesthetics, was moving decisively to Russia. The new phase of what Eagleton terms "political" criticism was perhaps inaugurated by Lenin's articles on Tolstoy (1908-11), in which, in a manner reminiscent of Marx and Engels on Balzac and Goethe, Lenin argues that Tolstoy transcended the limitations of his own class ideology by transferring his loyalty to the Russian peasantry in the revolution of 1905. The sharp contemporaneity of Lenin's focus is an obvious point of contrast

<sup>27</sup> Plekhanov has been much better served in English translation than the arguably more deserving Mehring: see Georgi Plekhanov, *Art and Social Life*, ed. Andrew Rothstein (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1953). For his essays on Ibsen and on the eighteenth century in France, among others, see Georgi Plekhanov, *Art and Society and Other Papers in Historical Materialism* (New York: Oriole Editions, 1974). Solomon, *Marxism and Art*, pp. 119-24, offers a generous but well balanced account of Plekhanov's historical importance, in particular his importation into Marxism of Karl Bücher's theory of the relation between primitive art and the labour process.

<sup>28</sup> It is worth noting that 1914 is also the point at which Kautsky's participation in Marxism, which had cast a very long shadow for several decades, effectively ended. Kautsky's aesthetic interest was essentially in the visual arts, on which he wrote a great deal for the Viennese journal *Zeitschrift für Plastik* in the 1880s.

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with “anthropological” criticism, as is the alignment of aesthetic judgments with fairly immediate political purposes. The dangers of this contiguity come to the fore most strongly in Lenin’s essay, “Party Organisation and Party Literature” (1905), which does not renounce the liberality which permits that “everyone is free to write and say whatever he likes, without any restrictions”,<sup>29</sup> but reserves the right to expel from the Bolshevik Party those whose exercise of this freedom brings them into conflict with the Party line. (It is clear in the essay that Lenin’s remarks may apply to creative writers as well as commentators on politics.) Lenin justified such a policy because the Party was a “voluntary association” whose ideological integrity needed to be protected if it was to achieve its historical aims. Once it had done so and actually became the governing party in 1917, a little later making itself coterminous with the state, such a policy applied to art was obviously full of repressive potential. When, in 1931, Stalin attacked Rosa Luxemburg and her associates for being precursors of Trotskyism in his article, “Some Questions Regarding the History of Bolshevism”, the rewriting of the history of the nineteenth century beginnings of Marxist literary criticism was one of the inevitable, if more minor, consequences. Those who had endeavoured in that period to enlarge the range and scope of Marxist aesthetics would soon be past their sell-by date as a result, unless they were so intellectually compromised (or capable of being so) as to be worthy of honour in Stalin’s philistine polity. Mehring in particular, having been lauded by Luxemburg, was viciously attacked by many who now occupied places in the aesthetic division of the bureaucracy—none less ardent to damn him than Georg Lukács, the man who, Jameson reminds us, was foremost among those responsible for reorientating critics towards “a relatively Hegelian kind of Marxism”.<sup>30</sup>

Yet it is perfectly clear that the evaluation of art according to its political tendency was never originally intended by culture-inclined Bolsheviks to preclude other kinds of evaluation or to necessitate what eventually took place under Stalin—intensifying censorship, rigid prescriptivism for artists prepared to toe the line, and systematic liquidation of those who did not. The high point of “official” Soviet criticism is undoubtedly Trotsky’s *Literature and Revolution* (1924), in which all the best possibilities of artistic tolerance were promoted alongside the recognition that “it is silly, absurd, stupid to the highest

<sup>29</sup> Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, “Party Organization and Party Literature”, in Solomon, *Marxism and Art*, p. 181.

<sup>30</sup> The details of this sorry revisionist episode are recounted by Solomon, *Marxism and Art*, pp. 101-102.

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degree, to pretend that art will remain indifferent to the convulsions of our epoch".<sup>31</sup> Unreservedly suspicious of philistine attempts to reject the achievements of bourgeois art, to implement a "proletarian culture" in its place, and to impose widespread repression in the cultural field, Trotsky undertook a vigorous and trenchant survey of the contemporary state of Russian literature from his undeniably partisan position as one of the architects of the revolution. Insofar as government was concerned, he stated: "Our policy in art, during a transitional period, can and must be to help the various groups and schools of art which have come over to the revolution to grasp correctly the historic meaning of the Revolution, and to allow them complete freedom of self-determination in the field of art, after putting before them the categorical standard of being for or against the Revolution."<sup>32</sup> The position is characteristically contradictory. Once artists have "come over to the revolution", and once they have been helped to "grasp correctly" its historic meaning, they will be allowed "complete freedom of self-determination". But what if they do not "come over", or what if they do but fail to "grasp correctly", or, even if they do both, what if their allegiance to and "correct" understanding of the revolution later flags or is otherwise found wanting by those who consider themselves empowered to judge? The implications are obviously anxiety-provoking to liberal democratic sentiment.

Yet Trotsky's position goes to the heart of the debate about art and politics. If art has no political effectivity, but is merely a concern of hobbyists, then it can be left well alone by the state. But if it does indeed have an appreciable rôle in shaping a society, it would be a foolish government which did not keep an eye on and attempt to control its workings—and, indeed, many liberal democratic governments have imposed censorship and repression precisely out of a recognition of art's perceived social effectivity. If it happens that the best known cases in the "free world" are to do with the sexual rather than political content of literary texts—from the bowdlerization of Shakespeare to the banning of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*—all that is demonstrated thereby is that liberal governments have considered public discussion or dramatization of sexual mores to be a powerful social force requiring their vigilant control in much the same way as the Soviets came to consider expressions of political "deviance" a threat to the October revolution. Inimical as all artists understandably are to such control, where it is present it is clear that

<sup>31</sup> Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960), p. 12.

<sup>32</sup> Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, p. 14.

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art is not politically underestimated.

It is then something of an irony to come to understand that many of the advances in Marxist criticism were made by those who had temporarily or permanently turned away from engagement in direct political activity. Trotsky's composition of *Literature and Revolution* has often been considered a grotesque political irresponsibility, a cultural distraction which, among others, prevented him from properly ensuring that he became Lenin's successor, in which case the nightmare of Stalinism might not have followed. Because of that very nightmare, Lukács turned from political activism to the "safer" arena of literary criticism, and the best remembered "political" novels of the twentieth century are devastating satires on the Soviet system and its self-declared identity with Marxism (Zamyatin's *We*, Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*, Orwell's *Animal Farm*, and Nabokov's *Bend Sinister*). Gramsci, incarcerated by Mussolini, could no longer agitate in the factory movement of Turin, and instead penned his prison notebooks, in which he adumbrated his theory of "cultural hegemony". Benjamin, exiled in Paris and unable to return to Hitler's Germany, wrote his important texts on the city's nineteenth century culture, literary and otherwise. His Frankfurt School colleagues, such as Bloch, Adorno and Horkheimer, similarly relocated to New York, where they concentrated entirely on academic research which attempted to keep utopian and "high" cultural dreams alive. In the period of the Cold War, the only Marxist writer and critic of international repute who seemed to find the Eastern bloc congenial was Brecht. Otherwise, the main centre of gravity of Marxist cultural work shifted yet again, paradoxically, to the capitalist West, where it has become mainly the preserve of critics and theorists, and only infrequently the resort of creative writers.

## VII

The paradox is not new within Marxism: Marx himself, after the political disappointments of 1848, retreated to the British Library to write *Capital*. Likewise, the post-war period of "ideological" criticism was marked by tremendous theoretical advance and elaboration, especially in France, in the hands of expressly or implicitly Marxist theorists such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Lucian Goldmann, Louis Althusser, Pierre Macherey, Roland Barthes, Etienne Balibar and Pierre Bourdieu. The "price" paid was an increasing academisation (and thus neutralisation of the political effectivity) of the field, aided by a correspondingly intensifying rebarbateness and obfuscation in the discourse many of these scholars employed. The experience of reading any of the critics named above can

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hardly be said to be easy or straightforward. The level of education and degree of wider philosophical and theoretical knowledge required for their understanding are taxing. These factors served to widen the gulf between both this scholarly and analytic Marxist aesthetics and that to which Marxist artists might actively subscribe (the chances of another Brecht appearing who might convincingly combine theory and creative practice became more and more remote) and the remnants of the committed "political" criticism which persisted (cheerfully untheoretical British texts like John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* [1972] or Paul O'Flinn's *Them and Us in Literature* [1975] now seem rather vulgar and populist by comparison). Ever fiercer internecine debates consequently erupted from time to time. The growing influence of Althusser in particular drew a rhetorically memorable but overweeningly hostile reaction from the English humanist Marxist historian E. P. Thompson in *The Poverty of Theory* (1978), and a less fêted critique, Terry Lovell's *Pictures of Reality: Aesthetics, Politics and Pleasure* (1980), which calmly excoriated Althusserianism, but only to prescribe a return to a largely Brechtian aesthetics which by now seemed entirely of its moment and unresurrectable in the dawning of a period to be dominated by the "New Right". French Marxism had itself already been thrown into disarray by the political downturn following May 1968, shortly after which Althusser, in his most famous (or notorious) essay, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses", implicitly abandoned the hope of any significant social change coming from within the ideological sphere.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, it was not even that literature was no longer envisaged to have much potential for socialist radicalism: as Macherey and Balibar were to argue at greater length after him,<sup>34</sup> Althusser now envisaged the teaching of literature by the modern state within its educational institutions as a powerfully reactionary force to which all-too-optimistic Marxists had been blind. It was one of the many hegemonic ideological means whereby the state persuaded its citizens to adopt a value system which ensured resignation to the world-as-it-is rather than agitation to create the world-as-it-could-be.

Nonetheless, theses, anthologies and monographs in Marxist aesthetics continued to pile up with impressive plenitude throughout Cold War and Thatcher/Reagan periods in the liberal democracies in which the actualisation of Marxism, or even its slightest demonstrable effect on

<sup>33</sup> Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)", *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (London: New Left Books, 1971), pp. 127-86.

<sup>34</sup> Etienne Balibar and Pierre Macherey, "On Literature as an Ideological Form" (1978), in Mulhern, *Contemporary Marxist Literary Criticism*, pp. 34-54.

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official political policy, seemed something one would have been foolhardy to have gambled on. One can certainly trace its influence in every other theoretical trend, especially those with an implied or explicit political agenda, such as postcolonialism and feminism, which could eclectically adopt Marxist ideas and strategies without having to deal, as Marxism itself did, with the political embarrassment of something known as "actually existing socialism". The critique of the education system under capitalism, and of the specific rôle of literature within that system, was variously embellished, most often in relation to the literary classics, and frequently (especially in Britain) under the rubric of "cultural materialism", a term recommended by Raymond Williams in *Marxism and Literature* (1977) in a bid to advance Marxist aesthetics beyond the limiting concepts of reflection and mediation. But Marxist theory itself seemed paradoxically to have less direct political impact the more intellectually redistributed and reformulated it became. In the absence of any evident political use value, it nonetheless did acquire an obvious exchange value within the academic publishing and employment markets. In certain situations it seemed unperturbed that it could take a detour around political questions entirely. Fredric Jameson's *Marxism and Form* (1971), the first of his many volumes which eloquently reconfigured Marxist aesthetic thinking, declared itself to be a "general introduction" to "a relatively Hegelian kind of Marxism" within a tradition which he described as "a mixture of political liberalism, empiricism and logical positivism which we know as Anglo-American philosophy and which is hostile at all points to the type of thinking outlined here", and he was thus able to bypass entirely the distractions of "vulgar" Marxist political positions, which had never made any serious impression on American intellectual life in the first place.<sup>35</sup> Jameson's work, whose main themes have changed little in over thirty years, is perhaps the most supple, elegant and influential contribution made to Marxist aesthetics yet, but again at serious cost, for it has arguably refined and adjusted the intellectual methods of Marxism in its application to the arts in an exclusively contemplative mode, all the while neglecting to address the issue of what this means for actual political practice.

But this is a standard which Marxism, uniquely among critical theories, has exacted from itself, ever since the eleventh and most famous of Marx's "Theses on Feuerbach" concerning philosophers before him who only *interpreted* the world: "the point, however, is to *change* it". A deconstructionist, for example, may happily dismantle the opposition

<sup>35</sup> Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, pp. ix, x.



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between “interpretation” and “change” and hold that an interpretation, if it gains general consent, *is* a change, because the intellectual work of analysing society is integral to the process of transforming it. For a Marxist to do so would wilfully constitute an evasion of Marx’s basic point, which is that interpretation *on its own* is never enough (a point which takes us back to the dialectical model of base/superstructure relations). It remains the case, however, if the resourcefulness and survivability of capitalism is a touchstone, that Marxist intellectual theory has more evidently allowed us to interpret the world anew rather than manifestly changed the relations of production—and this truth seemed ineluctable when the “actually existing socialism” of the Eastern bloc crumbled in the late 1980s and the historic changes made in the name (if not the spirit) of Marxism went into dramatically rapid reversal.

One other truth seems to be that Marxism has consistently been more potent as a critique than as a programme. During the international oil crisis of the 1970s, capitalism entered one of the periodic slumps which Marx diagnosed as the inevitably recurring outcome of its systemic contradictions (at which historical moment, incidentally, this volume first appeared). One might have expected, in these circumstances, a widespread turn to Marxist explanatory models and political action. Instead, Jean Baudrillard’s *The Mirror of Production* (1975) simultaneously threw down the postmodernist gauntlet to most fundamental Marxist tenets. Baudrillard was closely followed by Jean-François Lyotard, who attacked all “grand narratives” (including Marxism) in *The Postmodern Condition* (1979). It is undeniably the case, over the next quarter century, that postmodernism became the philosophy in the ascendant in the aesthetic sphere. While one struggles to name significant contemporary writers one can unequivocally designate as Marxist, a simple perambulation around any literary bookstore will now yield dozens who are undeniably postmodernist. In the critical sphere, attempts to integrate postmodernism (and/or poststructuralism) with traditional Marxism resulted in the oddly termed (and contestably conceived) “post-Marxism” (see, for example, Tony Bennett’s *Outside Literature* [1990]), but mainstream Marxism has proved generally more resilient than other “grand narratives” to such incursions and, in books like David Harvey’s *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1980) and Jameson’s *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), produced the finest intellectual responses to the postmodernist challenge. The last, almost certainly the most talked-about academic text of the 1990s, read postmodernism as a response to the changed nature of capitalism, which, Jameson argued, has been transformed, particularly in the post-Second World War period, from being the sum total of a number of similar systems of state and/or monopoly capitalism operating within distinct

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national boundaries and under markedly differing degrees and kinds of legal and governmental regulation, to a more unified system organised on a global scale by and around multinational corporations whose activities transcend and shatter the older national divisions. Philosophical and literary postmodernism, for Jameson, ultimately do little more than oil the wheels of this system in the cultural realm. They attempt to normalise the new world order with its relativising discourses, which propose to abolish the “master narratives” such as Freudian psychoanalysis, Marxism, scientific rationalism, and so on, which had been held up to explain the old order. All the while they ignore the “master code” which continues to determine everything, including those relativising discourses themselves, namely the newly configured (“late” or “advanced”) capitalism. Thus Jameson brought Marxism thudding back onto the table, in the intellectual sphere at least, with a classically Marxist argument, engaging with contemporary thought and society, and demonstrating the rôle of ideology, art, and immanent critique to the preservation of, developments within, and challenges to the economic order. The enterprise convinced many that, whatever emerges from the post-post-everything epoch within which all cultural discourse seems now to be conducted, the waning flame of Marxism, under whatever name and in whatever form, is unlikely to be extinguished, and will have much more to say about art and the social processes which engender it and which it, in turn, modulates.

**Nottingham, 1 May 2006**

## A Note on the Text

### Macdonald Daly

The present volume derives from the first edition (New York, International General, 1974), but deviates from it in the following respects:

- (1) The original edition included a "Supplement" (pp. 147-56) comprising four texts or extracts by other hands, namely: Eleanor Marx, from "Recollections of Mohr" (1895) and "Notes on the Friendship of Heine and Marx" (1895); Paul Lafargue, from "Reminiscences of Marx" (1890); and Francis Kugelmann, from "Small Traits of Marx's Great Character" (1928). This supplement has been entirely omitted from this edition, essentially because I consider it peripheral to the writings of Marx and Engels themselves and, while the four texts do contain material pertinent to Marx's thinking and preferences on aesthetic matters, the sometimes hagiographic impulses of the authors render them factually unreliable.
- (2) The bibliography of English language materials provided in the original edition (pp. 157-74), which was not compiled by the original editors, extensive though it was, is now severely dated. Any attempt to update it while maintaining its expansive spirit would have swelled it to an unwieldy size, and the resulting revision would itself rather rapidly become obsolete. For these reasons it has been entirely omitted.
- (3) The original volume contained a "Name Index". I have replaced this with a totally new "Index" which, including much more than nominal data, is fuller and should hopefully be more useful to the reader.
- (4) Footnotes have been revised throughout, many new notes have been added, and a very small number deemed unnecessary have been removed. All material of a supplementary nature (other than translations of words, phrases and quoted passages and one or two simple explanatory interpolations) now appears in footnotes (the original edition occasionally placed such material contiguous to particular extracts). In all cases amendments and additions are made silently as it seems unnecessary to leave a trail of these differences between this and the original edition. Those who may be interested in the variations are at liberty to compare both editions. Footnotes are restricted only to the sections authored by Marx and Engels. In other words, I have resisted the temptation to amend, explain or supplement discussions provided by the original editors (with one exception, namely footnote 36). While

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some of the material in their contributions (particularly in Morawski's Introduction) may now benefit from a later editor's occasional aside, it seems to me more important that the authorial integrity of their contributions (which, among other things, reflect the date of their composition) should remain intact. As an alternative, my own short history of Marxist aesthetics, above, attempts to bring this volume up to date by situating it within subsequent developments.

- (5) American spellings have been anglicised and typographical errors corrected, in all cases silently.
- (6) All translated material is now included in the main text in square brackets immediately after the words, phrases or passages which appeared in the original edition in languages other than English (following the dominant practice of the original edition, but rendering it consistent). Some of these translations are new, and in one or two places I have altered the original editors' translations on the grounds of perceived accuracy or felicity. My tendency has been to translate all such matter unless it seems predictably understandable to the reasonably educated monolingual reader.
- (7) The present edition does not retain the pagination of the original.
- (8) Graphic material included in this edition is new.

The extracts from the works of Marx and Engels which make up the core of the volume have not been altered. They have not been supplemented, abridged or rearranged, but appear here exactly as they appeared in the original (subject to the minor corrections indicated above), and the original editors' design and structure has been entirely preserved.

I would like to thank Ellis Sharp and Valeria Faravelli for proofreading the text at particular stages, and James Binns, Svenja Adolphs and Heike Bartel for assistance with some local aspects of translation. Finally, my warmest thanks for their consent to this new edition of their work must go to Stefan Morawski and Lee Baxandall, the latter, additionally, for his hospitality on my two visits to him and the Documents on Marxist Aesthetics archive he possesses in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. It should be made a matter of record that the original editors imposed no conditions on the revising editor, allowing him a totally free hand. Thus any inaccuracies which remain in the text (as well as errors of judgment) are solely my responsibility.

## Editors' Preface to the First Edition

Lee Baxandall and Stefan Morawski

The selection and ordering of the texts which follow depart from the practice of earlier editors.

Dialectical and historical materialism is the context in which the aesthetic thought of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels is cradled and in which it functions. And yet, we have included relatively few basic philosophic statements by Marx and Engels. We found it unnecessary to extend the book or to encumber the aesthetic texts by making reference to fundamental writings which are not only easily obtainable elsewhere, but can be better presented and understood in their complete context. Of course, we have benefited a great deal from the pioneering editions by Mikhail Lifshitz. Even here, the reader will surely understand that we thought to improve on earlier approaches.

Accordingly, what choices and dispositions of texts were made? Included is the basic aesthetic thought of Marx and Engels. The selections deal in part with the allogenetic aspects (the external relations) of art, and they bear partly on the idiogenetic aspects of art (its relative autonomy and specificity). Because the latter aspects have generally been neglected or pushed into the background, we have taken care to provide an adequate representation of this side of Marxian aesthetic thought.

The basic texts are patterned around what are discerned as the dominant themes of Marx and Engels in this area. To these dominant themes, some less developed observations and remarks may be attached. See Section II of the introductory essay for an explanation of this practice. We stress that no attempt has been made to give an exhaustive documentation; if the reader seeks added reading in the less basic or more peripheral texts bearing on the arts (e.g., incidental remarks on writers or artists, whether or not in the context of the dominant themes), the most recent German or Russian language collections should be consulted.<sup>36</sup> Section III of the introductory essay offers a general methodological perspective of the dominant themes. To more fully grasp the Marxian world view one should read the philosophical works of Marx and Engels and also those of their most authentic interpreters, e.g., Lenin, Gramsci, Lukács.

In further structuring the material we would have liked to observe two criteria: an order of documents within each dominant thematic area according to the dates of their writing, and an arrangement of the material for each theme which would move from general to progressively more

<sup>36</sup> Anglophone readers may now also consult Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *On Literature and Art* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), a collection which had not been published when the present anthology first appeared.

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particular applications. Obviously, both aims could not be simultaneously accomplished. We had to choose, and we organized each of the dominant themes so that the texts might be read according to the date of composition. As a result, the concrete historical analysis of an issue will sometimes precede the general statements by Marx and Engels (this is especially so for alienation). Perhaps it should be explicitly pointed out that the section headings are only suggestive of emphasis—they are not intended to limit the scope of the material or to provide a hard-and-fast definition. When writing on history, ideology, and art, Marx and Engels usually discuss several matters which are pertinent to this book and included in a single text. For example, alienation and class values are surely inseparable; but in order to emphasize the central rôle played by alienation in the aesthetic thought of Marx and Engels, it is distinguished here from other themes. For another reason we have introduced the texts on Lamartine, a poet, as a specifically political figure. It seemed important to avoid giving the impression that Marx and Engels wrote about the works of poets without regard for the character of their lives; and indeed, the latter kind of text is as frequent as the former. However, we believe that the approach where one looks first to the artistic product of an artistic worker (e.g., the treatment of Chateaubriand) is not only more central to the Marxian heritage but has more obvious relevance for the student of aesthetic thought. Our general approach has also led us to present a number of texts in part rather than in whole. Ellipses indicate where internal passages are omitted, and brackets enclose a few brief editorial emendations to texts. Explanatory notes are provided where necessary.

# Introduction

## Stefan Morawski

### I. *A Note on the Texts and Previous Interpretations*

A fairly extensive literature of interpretations of the aesthetic thought of Karl Marx (1818-1883) already exists. The bibliography of writings on the aesthetic thought of Frederick Engels (1820-1895) is rather smaller. To begin with, the relevant surviving texts of Marx and Engels were collected for the first time in Russian in the early Thirties (*Ob iskusstvye*, ed. Anatoli Lunacharsky, Mikhail Lifshitz, and Franz P. Schiller [Moscow, 1933]). Indeed, many important manuscripts had turned up but a few years previously. This volume signalled the beginning of an adequate attention from scholars and a growing measure of recognition generally for the aesthetic thought of the founders of Marxism, as distinguished from the writings of Plekhanov, Mehring, Lafargue, and other followers on art and literature (for a useful account see Z. G. Apresian, "An Appraisal of the Work Done in the 1930s on the Foundation of Marxist Esthetics", *Soviet Studies in Philosophy*, Spring 1967, pp. 39-50).

During the early 1930s, a number of the Marx and Engels texts, with commentaries, began to appear in Soviet magazines and in the Communist foreign-language press, e.g., *International Literature* (Moscow), read by left-wing authors and critics in the United States and England. The Russian collection of 1933 was the basis of selections brought out in French (1936), German (1937), Spanish (1946), and English (1947). Meanwhile an augmented, revised Russian edition was published in 1938, and, after World War II, Lifshitz edited the first fundamental collection in German (*Ueber Kunst und Literatur*, East Berlin, 1948) and an enlarged two-volume edition in Russian (Moscow, 1957). The most recent fundamental edition, the work of Manfred Kliem, appeared in East Berlin during 1967-68; it offers previously overlooked texts, but does not include some of the important ones found in the Lifshitz 1948 edition, nor is Kliem's plan of organization equal to that of Lifshitz.

As supplements to the above sources: the youthful poems, narratives, and aesthetic views of Marx and Engels are in the so-called *MEGA* (*Historisch-Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Frankfurt am Main, 1927-, 1 Abt., Bd. 1). Translations of some of these writings are included by Robert Payne in his Marx biography and in *The Unknown Karl Marx* (New York, 1971). (These texts of their youth are most fully interpreted by Auguste Cornu, *Karl Marx et Friedrich Engels, la vie et leurs oeuvres*, Paris, 1954-62.) Marx's readings in aesthetics prior to 1840 are known from letters only, since his earlier research notebooks are lost. They exist thereafter, however, and are surveyed to 1856 by Maximilien Rubel ("Les cahiers de

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lecture de Karl Marx", *International Review of Social History*, II, iii [1957], 392-418 and V, i [1960], 39-76). Finally one must mention *Freiligraths Briefwechsel mit Marx und Engels*, ed. M. Häckel (Berlin, 1968).

The following are the major interpretations of the aesthetic thought of Marx and Engels (together with essays which introduce the major compilations): Peter Demetz, *Marx, Engels, and the Poets* (Chicago, 1967; Ger. ed., Stuttgart, 1959; for a critique see L. Baxandall, *Partisan Review*, Winter 1968, pp. 152-156); Georgij M. Fridlender, *K. Marx i F. Engels i woprosi litjeraturi* (Moscow, 1962); Andrei N. Jezuitow, *Woprosi rjealizma w estjetike Marxa i Engelsa* (Moscow, 1963); Georg Lukács, *K. Marx und F. Engels als Literaturhistoriker* (Berlin, 1938) and *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Aesthetik* (Berlin, 1954), pp. 191-285; Pavel S. Trofimov, *Otsherki istorii marksistokoj estetiki* (Moscow, 1963), pp. 5-108; Hans Koch, *Marxismus und Aesthetik* (Berlin, 1962); Henri Lefèbvre, *Contribution a l'esthétique* (Paris, 1953); Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez, *Art and Society: Essays in Marxist Aesthetics* (New York, 1974; Span. ed., Mexico City, 1965); Mikhail Lifshitz, *The Philosophy of Art of Karl Marx* (New York, 1938; Russ. ed., Moscow, 1933); Max Raphael, *Proudhon, Marx, Picasso* (Paris, 1933), pp. 123-185; W. C. Hoffenschefer, *Iz istorii marksistskoj kritiki* (Moscow, 1967), chaps. V and VI; Franz P. Schiller, *Engels kak literaturnij kritik* (Moscow, 1933); and Vera Machackova, *Der junge Engels und die Literatur* (Berlin, 1961).

## II. *The Preliminary Problems*

Peter Demetz has sharply severed the aesthetic thought of Engels from that of Marx. He is not the only Western scholar to have done this. Marx is attributed with having broad European tastes—Engels, German and provincial preferences; Marx is said to have been cool or indifferent to realism while Engels advocated it; and so on. What is true is that the home backgrounds and early years of the two men were distinctive and so, too, were their youthful enthusiasms. Engels was engrossed by the *Junges Deutschland* (Young Germany) movement, and he wanted to follow the example of its leading figures. Marx was acquainted at an early age with the classical literary heritage; eagerly absorbing it, he wrote poetry and studied philosophy and aesthetics at the University of Bonn where A. W. Schlegel was among his professors. Nevertheless, the early writings of both men indicate a converging development. With the start of their intimate collaboration (September 1844) the aesthetic standpoints grow together. One can speak confidently of a coalescence of their major aesthetic ideas; the unity of their approach to problems does not deny



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differences in their temperaments or in their special interests. Their individual emphases on certain topics and problems can easily be distinguished. Marx was more competent in abstract thought and was more systematic. Engels was more responsively sensitive and spontaneous. Where Marx was university-trained, the brilliant Engels was in large part self-educated. Marx's ideal (as Cornu characterizes it) was Prometheus and Engels', Siegfried of the *Nibelungenlied*. Yet, the growing-together of their approaches is evident—one cannot mistake it in the major critiques of Eugène Sue's *The Mysteries of Paris* (in *The Holy Family*, 1845) and Ferdinand Lassalle's drama *Franz von Sickingen* (see the 1859 correspondence with the author), where their views coincide even though they did not write their analyses in direct consultation.

Twice, Marx made plans to write systematically on aesthetics. In the winter of 1841-42 he worked with Bruno Bauer on a critique of Hegel's view of art and religion. Later he sought to comply with an 1857 bid from the *New American Cyclopedia* for an article on "Aesthetics" (evidently with that aim, he reviewed F. T. Vischer's works, E. Müeller's history of ancient Greek aesthetics, and other writings). Neither undertaking was ever realized.

Accordingly, the question is left open as to how the texts of Marx and Engels on aesthetic matters should be organized. A chronological ordering would not in itself be especially enlightening. I will approach the matter by (a) discussing whether two phases, one pre-Marxian and the other Marxian, appear in their writings on art and literature and by (b) outlining the thematic patterns of structural coherences to be found among their many scattered ideas and comments.

Surely the former of these problems cannot be disposed of without considering the general development of the Marxian philosophy and world view. In *Pour Marx* (Paris, 1966; English edition, 1970), Louis Althusser re-opened the controversy on the question of "phases". He regards *The German Ideology* as a *coupure épistémologique* (the term is Bachelard's) and states that this work abandoned the ambiguous idea of humanism in favour of a scientific, i.e., Marxist approach. The notion of such a "cut-off point" seems, however, impossible to maintain. The efficacy of the Marxian world view does not consist in its presumed status as a pure science—for it is above all a philosophy of history, of which social science (empirically founded) is a constituent part, and both as philosophy of history and as social science obvious elements already appear in the *Paris 1844 Manuscripts*. A solution contrary to Althusser's, and yet as extreme in character, was offered by Robert C. Tucker. The worst of Tucker's view of the general development of Marx's writings is that he misunderstands and distorts the ideas. Tucker argues in *Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx* (London, 1961) that the theoretician and founder

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of the most widespread and successful political movement of workers was neither a sociologist, an economist, nor historian. Marx was—says Tucker—a prophet who overlooked the realities of life to project his visions onto the social universe; a moral philosopher, Marx dreamt of the “aesthetic life” awaiting mankind. Tucker does make useful points in locating “change within continuity” in Marx’s and Engels’ intellectual development. Yet, he excludes a significant treatment of key issues of Marxian philosophy and aesthetics; if his assumptions are correct, one hardly can take seriously their notions of the dependency of art on socio-economic processes, the class context of the artist’s origins and functions, or the dialectically founded discrepancy between the cultural and material levels of human development. But Tucker’s assumptions are in error. And Marx, the student of history, has established more firmly than anyone that historical and sociological studies provide decisive insights into the permanent attributes and changes of art. That said, Tucker still does encourage us to see how much Marx, the philosopher of history, regarded the increase of artistic activity as a sure sign of human liberation.

To sum up: the intellectual development of Marx and Engels was neither purely scientific nor purely utopian—and, if we regard it with the analysis of either Tucker or Althusser, we shall distort it. Their concerns, deeply rooted in social observation, appear in late as well as early writings. These include: artistic freedom as opposed to alienation (dating from Marx’s 1842 commentary on censorship); the proliferation of artistic activity in the epoch following class society, tied with art’s emergence in the labour process (the 1844 *Manuscripts*); and the discussion of “tendency” writing (Engels on *Junges Deutschland*). One could chart these themes and dates in juxtaposition to their reemergence—or again, the character of aesthetic experience (linked to the rise of labour and art) in 1844 and in *Capital* (1867); realism, probed in 1859 and the 1880s; “tendency”, in 1846-48 and the 1880s. No aesthetic issue, once raised, vanished; they all recurred, even if often in altered context. Because the continuities are demonstrable, I shall consider here the whole of their aesthetic thought starting at the end of 1842, when, despite the lasting traces of the thought of Hegel and Feuerbach, the founders of Marxism are well started in defining their distinctive world view. The process moved along rapidly in 1843, and at year’s end, Marx already spoke of the “material force” of the emergent philosophy of history. If I insist on selecting the articles on creative liberty from the *Rheinische Zeitung* as the starting-point, it is because I find here (as M. Lifshitz and some other Marxologists do not) one of the abiding, fundamental themes of Marxist aesthetics. As the years passed, then, Marx and Engels made no basic changes of direction; instead, they established with deepened analyses the course they would pursue to reach the goal they had affirmed in 1842,

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when they were revolutionary democrats. The direction was always toward superseding the era of the coercive state, where people are regularly deprived of the right to "their own style". As Engels was to put it late in his life: the struggle led by the proletarian class against the capitalist system was sure to provide access for the whole of humanity to the "kingdom of freedom".

We are faced with another preliminary problem. How shall those brief, scattered texts on literature and art be systematized? As a precaution, and indeed, a central procedure, we should distinguish the writings which explicitly and coherently elaborate a topic from the fragments which contain a thesis about a topic but which leave it undeveloped in part and thus rather unclear, and, from the hasty or opaque comments which, as such, don't offer a reliable basis for a thesis. The first category may be termed the dominant themes of Marx and Engels; the second may be termed observations; the third, remarks. In the first category are to be found most of the issues providing the topic-headings in the selection of texts: i.e., the origin of aesthetic sensibility, the alienation which affects the artist and his work, the problem of realism, "tendency" writing, the class equivalents of art. (I may point out that each of these dominant themes—with the exception of the first—is concerned with art's functional aspects, and these correspond to specific attributes of artistic structures.) Among the semi-finished themes of the second category, we find: the distinguishing traits of aesthetic objects and aesthetic experience; the recurrent attributes and enduring values of art; the comic and the tragic; form and style. The third category, comprised of brief comments, includes topics such as the distinction between science and art, the rôle of philosophy in artistic creation, and the hierarchy of artistic values.

The sustained treatments by Marx and Engels of the Sue novel and the *Sickingen* play by Lassalle are, not surprisingly, a prime textual source for the dominant themes. The general methodological assumptions and procedures are best interpreted and oriented to these dominant themes. On the other hand, a grave injustice would be done to the breadth and complexity of Marxian aesthetic thought if we excluded the second and third categories of materials from the patterning of the *disiecta membra*. Therefore, where appropriate, the major topics can be amplified by this material.

### III. General Methodological Assumptions and Dominant Themes

Many propositions of Marxian aesthetic thought are far from generally agreed upon today. The debates among those who write on the topics can be sharp, but there is some agreement on a few propositions, and

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something like consensus on one key formulation which we may state as follows: aesthetic phenomena are studied in a context of socio-historical processes, and in this way are regarded as part of a broad, "civilisational" activity by which the species *homo sapiens* advances slowly to realize an innate potential. Art objects are not isolated phenomena, but are mutually dependent with other cultural activity of predominantly social, political, moral, religious, or scientific character. But how shall we describe the dynamics of the interdependence with these other fields of human endeavour? This mutuality is of dual character: in current parlance it is a synchronic dynamism, transacted in a given moment of the constituted structure of society, and it is also a diachronic dynamism, with the givens of the past being reconsidered by and affecting the present, and the future. Why do the fluctuations occur in what is highly appreciated or acknowledged in the aesthetic field? Basically, Marxism says this is due to changes in the ideology, i.e., systems of thought which are delimited by human interests, and accordingly in attitudes toward the givens. Ideologies, which are always highly complex, are conditioned in the last instance by the pervasive contradictions and general evolution of the class-divided societies of history. There is, however, besides ideology, another chief factor influencing the change of attitudes toward aesthetic phenomena; this is the contradiction which repeatedly asserts itself between settled ideology and the attitudes which individuals freshly discover in assessing the human social and natural situation—and which have a powerful emotional and volitional potential. We may speak of these latter sources of contradiction as "psychosocial", and perhaps as "mythological", in character.

This, very briefly, is the context and the dynamic of art phenomena, as Marxian thought specifically conceives them. In addition, the dynamism occurs in two separate fields of interdependence. These are the idiogenetic setting of influence, where new aesthetic activity is affected by *previous aesthetic* models; and, the allogenic setting, where *non-aesthetic* givens have influence on new artistic activity. This may appear obvious; but the distinction is worth making clear at once.

These elements of mutuality in a context and of dynamics of change cohere into a methodological position when one seeks to approach the various problems posed by aesthetic objects and aesthetic activity. The best name for the approach is: *historicism*. The framework of Marxian aesthetic thought is, then, historicist. We may ask how the dominant themes of Marx's and Engels' aesthetic thought are clarified as we orient them by historicism. One dominant theme, already noted, concerns the birth, or genesis, of art; and four other dominant themes relate to the functions of art. None of these can be adequately understood apart from historical data which affect the traits and changes of art.

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For instance—we consider *the genesis of art* (of artistic sensibility) in a context which includes the historical activity of *homo sapiens* as a whole. What are we able to find? The peculiar phenomena of this field emerge in the closest connection with the survival activity of our species at a primitive level; the phenomena then pursue a checkered course through the pressures and interests of our historical, class-striated societies; the specifically focused energy of the activity of art is continually sustained by the undying and evolving human wish for freedom from coercion, injustice, hunger, and chaos. This analysis of the developmental context leads by a seamless transition, we see, to the problem (and dominant theme) of the *class context* and *class equivalents* of the phenomena, as these functionally emerge. In the broadest, most profound and ongoing aspect, the class mutuality of art with its social contexts has to be described as its *alienation*, together with that of its makers and users. By the same token, the potent energies which renew art may, in their most profound aspect, be considered to strive for its eventual *disalienation*, but again only in a total human and historical context. Disalienation would find *homo faber*, working humanity, gain the cooperative ability to go beyond exhausting toil in oppressed conditions to adopt social relations which more resemble play. Active then as *homo aestheticus* (among other basic traits), this future humanity might freely and creatively achieve the realization of the totality of potential faculties.

Does the Marxian historical approach deny that aesthetic ideas and artistic expression possess a relative autonomy, as they develop in various distinguishable traditions? Not at all! On the other hand—realism is common in art and literature; so is the evidence of the artist's sociopolitical "*tendency*", asserted or implicit; and these phenomena manifest the historical process and its ideological patterns, which anyway are latent in art.

A full treatment by Marxian historicism of artistic realism and "*tendency*" in art will bring in three related ideas or themes, which lend this part of the approach much of its breadth and dynamism. I mean the emphasis given by Marx and Engels to human labour, which conditions and makes culture possible; the insistence that social revolutions have their place, as unavoidable and therefore desirable links in the progress of the species; and the contention that the communist commitment is both an ideal that humanity adopts, and a real, historically applicable means of advancing that change. The reader should have seen earlier how fundamental labour, for Marx and Engels, is both the primordial activity from which aesthetic sensibility may develop, and a conditioning matrix which never ceases to impinge to some extent on artistic creation. The ideas and feelings which contribute to social revolution, judged an integral part of history and at times central to human activity, are of course seen as

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appropriate for artistic representation. It is nothing new for poetry to acquire stature as a kind of "legislator" or tribune on behalf of suffering humanity, and it is widely accepted that when the social awareness of material conditions spreads, change becomes possible; Marx and Engels simply describe this function in terms of their philosophy of history and the communist ideal. Their historicism enables us to see, finally, how this function is fulfilled or fails, in the way people propose ideas and artistic methods which they either have grown capable of enacting or they envision as leading to early success (the "utopian" transcendence of the problem). Unfortunately, in many cases, the utopian glance forward mystifies the social reality of the present (art included); a *camera obscura* effect looks upside-down at the mutually dependent elements, with the result that symptomatic aspects (ideological, artistic, etc.) may be asserted as the basis on which all else rests, or moves. In short: mystification (whether of the conformist or the utopian variety) may dull the awareness which could arouse or perhaps even point the way for historical change.

Another aspect of Marxian historicism must be mentioned in understanding the dominant aesthetic themes; I mean the explicit notion that the idea of progress of the species must be qualified by recognition that there has been an unequal development of the cultural as compared with the economic and technical fields. We would be completely perplexed in describing and estimating historically early art if we assumed its attainment must correspond to the material level in its time. On the other hand, modern art is created in a genetic framework of higher achievement and complexity (religious, philosophical, scientific, technical, etc.). which offers no guarantee that the present aesthetic achievement can match that of olden times. The oddity of this unequal development seems, in some part, to stem from the collective endeavours and myths of antiquity, and the extreme individualism of artistic work in capitalist times. This last factor also encourages the enlarged place for chance and accident in modern art. The phenomenon also helps explain why old artistic "forms" are often borrowed for new uses (cf. Marx's letter of July 22, 1861 to Lassalle, where he discusses the misunderstanding of Greek drama by the seventeenth-century French dramatists who made ample use of its forms). The notion furthermore adds perspective to modern debates on art vs. science and art vs. industrialism. Writing on the theme of the *Ende der Kunstperiode* ("the end of the era of art") in the *People's Paper* of April 19, 1856, Marx showed himself the apt pupil of Hegel's views in this matter—but also the originator of a wholly new diagnosis of the decline. Certainly, the principle of unequal development between the "spiritual" and material fields saves Marxian historicism from a blind assertion of progress; especially in aesthetic matters.

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In these ways, art emerges and functions as a *specific mode of the social consciousness*. As for the work of art by the *individual artist*, it is distinguished from the general social consciousness in further ways: (a) desires and beliefs which often are mutually contradictory, not fully rational, are important; (b) a pervasive effect is established by the individual artist's vision, even granting its development in social context; and (c) nature, both within and outside, as experienced by the artist, is freshly opposed to the general social consciousness. Although mediated by culture, the juxtaposition represents an innocent seeing of the nature which is "beyond". The artist seeks to acculturate nature anew, and on the other hand, to naturalize culture. He hardly can avoid doing this while encountering reality in his time.

So far, I have treated the dominant aesthetic themes of Marx and Engels in order to illuminate the methodological approach which is continually brought to bear on them. It is now possible to turn the attention around, to closely scrutinize the dominant aesthetic themes in light of the governing methodology.

Again I remind my reader that we are treating *disiecta membra*. The ideas of Marx and Engels about literature and the other arts are scattered in passages which we must organize, *reconstruct* as to their coherence. I shall draw on the texts which seem most relevant to major problems and solutions of European aesthetic thought up to the present. On the other side, the aesthetic thought of Marx and Engels is integrally joined with their world view and philosophy of history. This contextual integration has been interpreted in two ways, which, mutually incompatible, must both be rejected. The first says that the Marxian approach to art and literature is "extrinsic"—*only* general-philosophical or *only* sociopolitical. The other says that *all* of communist thought is aesthetic—see Tucker—a Schillerian anthropology more or less, with the ideal *des spielenden Menschen*. This assertion is especially objectionable because Tucker sees the "aesthetic" pervasion as metaphysical and without a functional relation to empirical data.

### IV. *The Chief Aesthetic Problems Considered by Marx and Engels*

#### a. *The Origin of Aesthetic Sensibility*

Marx's treatment of the origin of aesthetic sensibility could not be sufficiently developed or tested by empirical data, which in his time were still scarce. Therefore, he developed a philosophical argument using available knowledge, as did other authors. Marx implicitly aimed his analysis against the theistic and naturalistic positions. He rejected the *je ne sais quoi* arguments of seventeenth-century thinkers as much as he

disputed an instinct that was peculiarly aesthetic and divinely endowed or naturally endowed.

Marx explained aesthetic sensibility as very gradually taking shape among the specific formations of concrete historical processes—foremost as part of the development of human labour. Artistic creation and aesthetic response are specifically human capabilities for Marx. They should not be confused with phenomena in the animal world that resemble them. *Homo faber*—labouring humanity—first gains and then refines aesthetic sensibility while improving work skills and mastering the material world through idea and activity. What is earliest achieved is the active artistic competence. The physical world is reworked to the harmonious standard, use, or measure (*Mass*) of humanity. Meanwhile, because the aesthetic skills are developed, the (humanized) play capacity finds new outlets: *Spiel seiner eignen körperlichen und geistigen Kräfte*. To this extent the *homo faber* is on the way to becoming *homo ludens*.

If then we want to talk about the aesthetic sensibility in its more contemplative aspect—i.e., the stricter or at least the more usual sense—we shall have to consider it a later development which derives from the art-formative phase. Marx once used the term “mineralogical sense” to describe an attitude which was aesthetically receptive to precious natural objects because it involved a more or less apractical detachment from the other possible functions. This mode of receptivity is describable as an interiorization of the sensibility which is needed by those who make artistic artefacts. As such it is a counterpart of the preceding process of human exteriorization which is artistic production. As the dialectic of exteriorization/interiorization continues, the artistic patterns that evolve and the protoaesthetic responses which these evoke build increasingly conspicuous relationships. Thus, a specifically aesthetic attitude is formed. The above account is greatly supported by Marx’s general theory of the process by which primitive humanity turns material reality to its needs through a process of appropriation (*Aneignung*) which is both objective and subjective. Among a number of functional attitudes, a specifically human aesthetic sensibility (which is first nothing but actively artistic) is generated by the total social praxis as the species affirms and realizes its “human essence”.

Briefly, this is the theoretical framework of the genesis of aesthetic sensibility which may be reconstructed from the texts of Marx. If we now turn to some of the relevant texts we shall both grasp the theme more firmly and see the interpretive difficulties. In the 1844 *Manuscripts* and *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* Marx discusses precious gold and silver objects; he states that their hues constitute “aesthetic properties” which stimulate “the most popular form of aesthetic sense”. We note that Marx calls colour attributes popular but not the most



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rudimentary mode of aesthetic stimuli historically. None the less, does this mean that Marx locates a *natural* foundation for aesthetic response in these sensuously experienced, physical colour traits? In other texts Marx discusses structural attributes, i.e., those historically evolved in the labour process (the humanized *Mass*, "measure", of the object), as the basis of the aesthetic response. Does this conflict with, or qualify, the observation on the hues of metals? Should we perhaps speak of *two* Marxian parallel categories—one consisting of colour-constituted aesthetic properties that appeal to a naturally endowed capacity enjoyed by a labour-developed humanity? I believe this suggestion is ill-founded; if we study the 1844 *Manuscripts* and *Capital* we can have no grounds to accept a naturally endowed aesthetic response which *homo faber* preserves intact through its development. We shall perhaps do better if we try to reconstruct Marx's idea of the stages of emergence of the aesthetic sensibility. I propose the following as a fair outline:

(a) At first, art developed; it was a kind of bonus as primitive workers formed objects for use and in general exercised and expressed their power to master the material world.

(b) After much time, the structure of the object (its inherent *Mass*, measure, proportion) could come to chiefly occupy the artisan's attention. At this stage, obsessive functionalism started to fade, and apractical aesthetic contemplation could begin to emerge.

(c) Aesthetic responsiveness to "given" physical attributes such as colour, timbre, etc., could develop at a later time when the aesthetic sensibility had become pronounced, relatively autonomous, and internally various. It would occur as a subsequent phase of this rudimentary process which is generated by human labour and centred on human labour, from which art and its subjective counterparts are generated. Marx's world view suggests to us that the overall process would require millions of years—spanning from the early paleolithic to the late neolithic era.

If we turn now to observations by Marx on the traits by which we distinguish art objects and aesthetic experience, some support and also amplification can be found for this reconstruction of the stages through which the aesthetic sensibility was generated. In the 1844 *Manuscripts*, the objective mode of the beautiful is said to be its "*Mass*", measure. Similarly, the *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Oekonomie* speaks of compact structure—"geschlossene Gestalt, Form und gegebene Begrenzung"—as the main characteristic of Greek art. Certainly, the German word "*Mass*" which Marx uses is correlated to his general world view, and has to be interpreted in various contexts. Here, it appears to mean: (a) reproduction of the *structures of physical reality* (their shapes mainly; primitive people found that in mastering these shapes, they also gained the best way to make tools, pots, shelter, etc.); and, (b) various

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specific attributes of symmetry, regularity, proportion, and harmony, which provide an attractive and coherent whole such as differs from—or more exactly, *rivals*—the shapes of material reality. But whatever else “*Mass*” meant for Marx, in aesthetic context this term definitely indicates an *inner compact structure* of the work of art. This is so even where there is attention directed to reproduction of the outward structure of real objects. Marx’s word “reproduction” where he speaks of the correlated emergence of the human capacities and the essential attributes of art should accordingly be kept very distinct from “realism”. How could he possibly have conceived of this “reproduction” as mimesis at the beginnings of aesthetic phenomena? No writer of the mid-nineteenth century knew the earliest cave art. Marx was preoccupied by the mythology in ancient Greek art, and he and Engels both described how primitive religions misshaped and suffused art. In neither era could a “measured” reproduction of the real world have been called realism. To Marx and Engels, realism was the aim of a particular and much later literary school or artistic emphasis—and it definitely was far from the basis of art. Rather, the Marxian idea of realism referred mainly to a typifying social representation. It did not connote fundamental formal structure, nor did it go back to the origin of art.

Their other concerns later in life kept Marx and Engels from further exploring the primordial formal structure in relation to the material world, although we see in their 1859 letters on Lassalle’s *Sickingen* play they did not lose interest in the formal problems. As for later investigations by Marxists, Lukács is most ample—treating mimesis as the fundamental principle (*Die Eigenart des Aesthetischen*, 1963); Lukács is too anxious, however, to provide the concept of “*Mass*”, measure, with an inclusive mimetic meaning. All true art is for him mimetic, and Lukács claims Marx as his witness. If we accept this conception then mimesis becomes a very vague and malleable phenomenon indeed. We see, moreover, how Lukács himself describes the development of mimetic art as occurring only because there was also a primitive emergence of relatively autonomous structures (which he calls the *Für-sich-Sein* of art). Although Lukács insists on the primacy of mimesis, he acknowledges the need for a certain internal organization of the magico-symbolic “artistic content”—which is of a proportionate character within a structure having relative autonomy.

Let us look more closely at the relatively autonomous structure of art. I think Marx’s observations in the matter bear out my interpretation rather than Lukács. A dealer (says Marx in the 1844 *Manuscripts*) sees the market for precious stones but not their beauty. Amplifying, Marx observes (*Contribution*) that the aesthetic pleasure afforded by a diamond on a woman’s bosom is lacking when the same stone is regarded as a commodity. In the former instance the “aesthetic use-value” is apparent,

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in other circumstances the stone's exchange-value rather than its specificity may prevail. Its aesthetic use-value is also, of course, distinct from the "mechanical" use-value of a diamond in "the hand of a glasscutter". We see, in its context, that the aesthetic use-value is a specific quality of the object, and directly gratifies a concrete human need. The apractical character of aesthetic experience is further brought out by several observations in *Capital* which primarily excoriate the odious experience of work in capitalist society. In a passage on ungratifying factory labour, for instance, Marx says the worker is deprived of "enjoying the work as a play of his own physical and psychic powers". He says of medieval handicraft in the *Grundrisse*: "this work is still half artistic, it has still the aim in itself (*Selbstzweck*)". Surely, we are barred by these foregoing passages from lending a basically utilitarian teleology to Marx's concept of aesthetic experience. On the other hand, they don't head off the interpretation that mimesis is the primary element of aesthetic experience. And yet, I think it is not insignificant that Marx nowhere encourages this interpretation. Moreover, he makes much of the idea that human activity, in its specifically human aspect, stands apart from nature. The 1844 *Manuscripts* declare that humanity "confronts" (gains a distance on) the materials and the aim with which it is productive. Unlike other species, our species acts according to the laws of beauty, adopting a due concern for the inherent measure of the object; in this way the human species "only truly produces in freedom" from immanent nature and abject need. I suggest that only on the basis of this freedom, too, can one conceive the making of an apractical, relatively autonomous world of art.

However, it should be noted here that Marx regards aesthetic experience as synthetic in character: a mingling of the intellectual, emotional, and sensual. This permits the presence of intensive mimetic material as "artistic content" without disturbing the apractical structure of the work of art. On the other hand, while a synthesis of such aspects, its reception is non-discursive, i.e., atheoretical. For instance, in the 1859 preface to the *Contribution* Marx distinguishes the intellectual and religious appropriations of reality from the artistic one. An 1858 letter scoffing at Arnold Ruge's rejection of Shakespeare finds worthless his notion that the presence of a "philosophical system" could give the edge to a work of art. Certainly the cognition which distinctively occurs in art is unlike other modes of cognition.

Does this distinctiveness of art objects also preclude ethical concerns as they are evidenced outside art? One might indeed tend to say so, from the way the pietistic moralism of Eugène Sue was ridiculed as inappropriate to the telling of his story. On the other hand, although Marx and Engels might jibe at morally callow authors who made their ethical judgments stridently central to their work, none the less they acknowledged an

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implicit moral superiority in certain human activities as compared with others, and they were committed to a human ideal which art's own central character contributed to realizing, on the one hand by its mere manifestation, and on the other hand as the medium for representations of the ethical ideals of humanity being recognized or realized. Here was an appropriate integration of aesthetic phenomena with moral perspective.

In sum, there has evolved since the genesis of aesthetic sensibility a situation where an object and a subject constitute together an aesthetic field. For the time of the transaction, each is somehow a self-sufficient, harmonious structure involved by the field, because at the time relatively autonomous from other functions and the greater world. The subject and object together make a "rival" world with its own distinctive traits—the "autotelic" does not, however, preclude cognitive and ideological aspects, and, on the whole, both the specific integration of the art object, and the unique resultant experience which enriches the psyche, retain links with the ordinary world and other human experience that are never severed.

In this treatment of the origin of art, I have reinforced the interpretation by also drawing on the observations of Marx and Engels as to the distinguishing traits of works of art and of aesthetic experience. It is also appropriate to consider in this place their observations concerning form and style. Form they considered as the whole of the artistic means—the necessary harmonious organization of the parts which constitutes a whole artistic structure. They wrote little on problems of form, and this is explained only in part by Engels' letter of 1893 to Mehring, where he says he and Marx were bound to lay emphasis first on content; more than this (and as the *Sickingen* letters confirm), they gave primacy to content; theirs is a *Gehaltästhetik*. Need I stress again that this statement in no way invalidates their underlying assumption that the work of art is an autotelic structure, experienced with a relative autonomy?

Style, in the treatment of both Marx and Engels, is the imprint of the individual artistic personality on the work of art. Neither said enough theoretically about the characteristics of style for us to connect what they said on the style of this or that artist to their thought on other aesthetic matters.

#### *b. Alienation and Disalienation of Art*

Productive labour provided not only the originating conditions of aesthetic activity and art. The latter have been decisively affected through history by the processes of development among employers and working people as a whole, together with the ensuing patterns of consumption by the various classes of society of the products of labour. Marx gave his attention chiefly to the capitalist era of culture and production, as he did in

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so many matters. But now and then he did comment on the artist's situation in other eras, and it seems proper to conclude that in the aesthetic field, too, he regarded alienation as characteristic of the development of civilisation up to the present. Looked at from the standpoint of progress of the human species, the progress has been paid for in distorting side-effects. Progress beyond the animal status was at the cost of engendering oppression, exploitation, and character disorder. Through this rigorous and inexorable civilisational dynamic, aesthetic activity and art objects were both developed and forced into patterns partially thwarting their potential realization. This is what the term alienation signifies. The alienation of art from its intrinsic potential complemented and gave aid to related fields for alienation: religious, political, etc.

Yet, if alienation has been inseparable from aesthetic phenomena in all historical eras, it undoubtedly became more intensive, in Marx's judgment, as the market conditions of capitalism developed. The capitalist market transformed art into a commodity, which it had never before been. An unknown purchaser would now be the source of the maker's livelihood. The pricing of the artefact would become a foremost factor. Where there had been a community of interests, values, tastes, and knowledge, now the need to depersonalize, and incentives to calculate as to the market and its buyers, became important. Moreover, what grouping was most separated from the maker of art objects? Clearly, it was the industrial working class, those who were the producers of the other commodities for the market. Labouring men and women had originated and long pursued aesthetic activity and art in a past grown irretrievable; their most direct descendants now lacked the time-off and surplus income to relate to art, which had, due to specialization and alienation, now to be produced by a remote stratum of experts.

What were the fundamental traits of the alienation processes during the capitalist era in particular, as described by Marx and Engels? These aspects may be specified as applying *inter alia* to the field of the arts, but never separable from the effects of alienation in other domains. The consequences in one field would moreover be felt through all of society, by persons of every degree and vocation.

1. *Homo faber*, the working person, is separated from the product of work. For the most part, the product may not be kept, used, enjoyed, or distributed by the producer. *Disposal of the product is at the discretion of owners of capital* who have organized its production or marketing. Profit is the aim.

2. Competition for profits also determines the internal character of the production process. There is usually *a tempo, repetition, uniformity, etc., in the order of work which enslave the maker of the object*. Rote labour defeats creative initiative.

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3. *Human individual and species-potential itself must be misshapen* when thus oppressed and exploited to achieve the needs of profit for the owners of capital. Alienation takes those who are at work further and further away, not only from their natural capacities and propensities, but even from the recognition of these.

This description to some extent touches on the alienation of working people in every kind of productive activity; and it embraces to some degree every era of class-divided socio-economic relations. If the reader thinks for example of the modern film industry, the best-selling novel industry, or the theatre business, the alienational aspect is apparent. Yet, the artist-expert has been given many advantages in every era; once the sale-value of his work is acknowledged, he is manifoldly compensated for the discomforts of having to submit to alienation. It is otherwise for the industrial worker who is considered interchangeable, part of a reserve factory force. And indeed, artists may be tempted to respond: "Alienation can't get a hold on me, as I give my art the highest priority, and whether it makes a lot of money for me doesn't matter. I choose my own themes and methods, I put the whole of my being into my artistic work, and I will let it go into the world only on my own terms". However, the more recognized and successful the artist, the less likely, on the whole, has it been that he could claim free and full control over the disposal of his product, the conditions and intentions of his work, and its correspondence to his natural or spontaneous potential. Both factory worker and artist are of course "free" to withhold their participation; one can sleep under a bridge, one can apply for welfare payments. If one does not imagine that aloofness to the marketplace and deprivation of a living income is true freedom, then the market in one or another of its ramifications will set the pre-conditions for even the most skilled, energetic, resourceful, and rebellious activity. Even the stubbornest of artists must either forego most of the socio-economic resources available to more amenable artists of the day, or else submit to recalculating all aspects of the original impulses to artistic activity, on a basis of their contribution to success in terms of the market and its buyers—the patrons and public of today.

The isolation of the artist, especially from the more responsive and supportive community of an earlier era, coupled with exacerbated conditions of oppression and conflict in society, has had mixed results. As Marx observed, the pre-conditions for some kinds of artistic activity virtually disappeared: no longer could a Milton spin out poetry as a spider might a web. Neither the workers nor the middle class were an apt audience for retaining the inheritance of art or for welcoming innovations. On the other hand, recognizing the flagrant dangers for aesthetic activity, the artist might take refuge in a bohemian community where, with other artists, he could pursue some cherished if still partly blighted projects.

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Dialectically, bohemia would, in its turn, become the attractive community of nonconforming ways of life-style for numbers of non-artists. Or again, while the rote or reproduction of *objets d'art* for the home undoubtedly lowered the standards of many involved in this work, yet the *objets* as assuredly raised or broadened the aesthetic experience of many middle and lower-middle class families. Some varieties of expression were thus democratized while they were homogenized and merchandised. Similarly, the *Communist Manifesto* noted a gain for literature from the capitalist world market: national boundaries took a beating, and world literature became a fact. On the whole, it may be said that the deterioration of the earlier communities for which art was conceived and by which it was received had a releasing effect on individual expression. The solitary artist could see more possibilities than those which group attitudes sanctioned; unprecedented works could be attempted without immediate fear of reactions, subsequent to the loss of that impersonal, often supremely disinterested market. Yet even the most audacious and achieved art of the capitalist era was marked by its setting. The fullest aesthetic potential seemed unrealized. The anguish of the artists was frequently a part of its complexion. And the best of this art was seldom accessible to more than a small elite; while others living in the era, including the average industrialist, merchant, or banker, got along on commercialized trash and spectacles designed above all to reap profits.

No wonder, then, that Marx and Engels preferred ancient art. They regarded the Greek achievements as unsurpassed. The Renaissance and Middle Ages, too, in their opinion had given more propitious conditions to art than did the nineteenth century. At that time, at least the alienation might have been mitigated by the artist's wholehearted participation in the class opinions of his patron; and the patrons were moreover often generous with commissions and non-interfering in their execution. By the mid-nineteenth century, many artists found the new patrons of the arts unbearable, and in fury or hope, they even were siding with the aspirations of the lower classes.

This is something of the historical dynamic which emerged as the alienation induced by civilisational development began to intensify. But Marxian philosophy did not leave the dynamic at that; it drew forth the *disalienational* processes from the intensified alienation of the present, and cautiously speculated where they might lead. The movement towards full disalienation and towards communism was identified. And this era, when productive individuals would enjoy the processes and the results of their work as the realization of their innate powers, was seen to coincide with the social superseding of the whole of history until then, considered as an epoch of socio-economic scarcity; in other words, the era of cooperation in realizing human needs and goals would depend on an

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unprecedented and democratized mastery of the problems set by nature and society. This was the expectation, and of course not only for aesthetic projections and fulfilment but in every field of human action. But what particularly of the aesthetic field? Marx, in fact, suggested that its scope would broaden out under more favourable socio-economic conditions, and, indeed, some of the specific aesthetic values would suffuse other fields as was the case in primitive society. A humanity grown productive and knowledgeable beyond any previous standards would be able to claim its birthright—also as *homo ludens*. Not attempting any detailed prediction, Marx mentioned three elements regarding this expectation:

1. The creative abilities of individuals would be fully developed; everyone capable of becoming a Raphael might do so.

2. The character of work would become increasingly aesthetic; its future would be *Selbstbetätigung*, a free play of the physical and psychic faculties.

3. Every person would grow capable of artistic achievement in every domain of the arts; there would no longer be professional painters but only painting as one pursuit in which everyone might participate.

Approaching such speculations today, in a context of the Marxian analysis of alienation and disalienation, what shall we think of them? The last of the three, which is earliest mentioned in *The German Ideology* and probably comes out of Fourier's papillon theory, recurs as late as Engels' *Anti-Dühring* despite some critical remarks on the Fourierist utopia. Can we single out any one, or two, of the three points for prime emphasis? I think not. The danger of a one-sided interpretation is visible in Marx, *penseur de la technique* (Paris, 1962), where the author, Kostas Axelos, not only gives foremost emphasis to the aesthetic suffusion of labour (*Arbeit als freies Spiel*), but he suggests that Marx anticipated a disappearance of the art object. If this were so, the Marxian disalienation would paradoxically provide a retrograde utopia, an atavistic lapse into the time when aesthetic structure had still to be consciously developed. In other respects Axelos' vision is a dimming of the Marxian original into a mere reverie on the idea of technological benefits. In my view, Marx unquestionably anticipated each of the three elements of aesthetic disalienation, and a communist revaluation of all values and vitalization of all reified processes would not promise anything less. We may still ask in how far, from our present vantage point, the expectations were firmly projected.

We cannot say with precision to what degree Marx and Engels should be seen as utopians in their speculation on aesthetic disalienation. The future can alone tell. I will venture, however, that they were rash in thinking that artistic specialization could disappear, and artistic capacities would be distributed evenly through the population (the third point). But if



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this was mostly wishful thinking, we can do no less than acknowledge the great prescience of Marx and Engels on point two when we consider today's tendencies to industrial art, happenings, the wedding of art directly to technology, the increased infusion of leisure with creativity. This aspect of Marxian philosophy now first truly coming into its own has been emphasized by Herbert Marcuse, starting with his *Essay on Liberation*; if Marcuse was at first drawn to the Axelos kind of interpretation, he has lately argued that the art object, as locus of form, will not disappear.

Most important in considering the disalienation theme, perhaps, is to remember that Marx and Engels were not given to prophecy as their method of inquiry. To examine their writings is to find few thoughts on the character of the future communist society. This absence of precise specification is not due, as Tucker alleges, to the lack of real grounds for their analysis and a substitution of vague messianism. The reason for reticence is their dislike of pontification. The advent of communism seemed economically and socially assured on the basis of the course of historical development in their analysis of it. This would certainly mean the end of alienation, as the conditions for it disappeared. But still, the advent of communist economic and social relations would provide but the basis, the threshold for the new epoch—the “pre-condition of freedom”. In place of prognostications Marx and Engels concentrated their energies on the analysis of existing capitalism and the dynamic it evinced for changing. The prime dynamic factor seemed to be the needs and latent capacities of the oppressed in capitalism; once the subordination of the “stupid masses” to the “burdened geniuses” who controlled their destinies was overthrown, the times would be ripe for the emergence of *homo aestheticus*.

Yet, the notion of *homo aestheticus* in even the most tentative formulations will be rejected by some critics as an unwarranted extrapolation from what we know about the capacities of our species. There is nothing in the hope for an expanded artistic activity and freely playful spontaneity in work and leisure, these critics say. For instance, Tucker ascribes exaggeration to Marx's anticipation of an enriched human being who will appropriate the world with a fullness of the senses and “in need of a totality of human life-activities”. Tucker does note the suggestion of hyperbole in the words Marx uses, but can he be right about the main issue? I think he misses the substantial historical point: that people can someday realize the potential which the existing social conditions suppress and distort. Indeed, is this a refutable thesis? The very mundane proof of it which is seen everywhere today has the effect of encouraging the risks which lead to further confirmation.

Another error which Tucker exhibits with aplomb: the disalienated

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personality is not to be reduced to an aesthetic personality. This violates the rounded, integrated Marxian vision. To be sure, Marx emphasizes aesthetic fulfilment, but in a greater totality, which is inherent to the historical dialectics of its conception. Thus, Tucker's chapters 14 and 15 depict the aesthetic liberation as coming out of the alienated self which has been rootless in alienated circumstances. But in Marx the process is considered as proceeding from the social action of persons in disalienating their circumstances. The communist individual is actualized—that is, goes from an *Unwesen* to a *menschlichen Wesen*—by transformational activity within a community and by a nature, which have been prepared by advances of humanity as a whole. In other words: the disalienated condition is as dependent on ethical, intellectual, and practical aspects as on aesthetic fulfilment.

Looking in another direction, the notions of disalienation and aesthetic realization have urgent bearing for the discussion of the Communist Person. Certainly, the endeavour to build Communist circumstances and personality has a decisive basis in ethical dedication, positive socio-economic theory, and practical experience—but it would be erroneous to omit appropriate attention to aesthetic activity and art in a socialist-based situation. The status of the arts must not be more goal-oriented and communicative than it is authentically artistic. On one page of the 1844 *Manuscripts*, discussing the terrible power of commercial values to twist all other values, Marx says, "If you want to enjoy art, you must be an artistically cultured person." It must seem an obvious remark. But it does assume a developed capability of the Communist whole personality, which some influential persons in those circumstances are not prepared to encourage, because they demand a solely communicative art of the socialist perspective. Surely Marx's words serve as a rebuke to those who justify a massive propaganda inculcation of the population through "the arts", while penalizing or silencing the artists who will not adapt themselves to this single purpose.

#### *c. Class Values Embodied in Art*

Alienation and disalienation are quite evidently themes that are inseparably bound together in the thought of Marx and Engels. As for the remaining dominant themes of their aesthetic thought, these can be said to expand on the topics of alienation and disalienation, to the extent that a given work of art contains or embodies an ideological dimension. Ideology will here be considered as the statement or symptomatic expression of a pattern of social-class attitudes, interests, or habits of thought. When ideology is exhibited indirectly, as symptomatic expression, the artist may or may not be aware of having adopted a position. Such patterns may be elucidated by the experienced, careful, and

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knowledgeable critic, also in some cases where the work of art offers no portrayal of class interests in conflict and it adopts no tendentious position. Whatever the class or social values held and manifested by the artist, their motivation or cause will lie in the alienation which afflicts art and social life.

From the standpoint of alienation, some class values must be called morbid. These are the conscious or unconscious values which speak for the interests of the status quo in the patterns of a dominating class which has grown reactionary. Other works of art will oppose the alienated conditions, either latently or manifestly, with values approximating those of a particular class. Their phrases or their basic values may correspond to the attitudes of social classes that have not yet won their "place in the sun" historically—or whose class hegemony has earlier come and gone. The more rebellious the artist then the more likely to be deliberated are his aesthetic choices having class or social implication—and he may prove subject to many inner conflicts as compared with artists who rely on the more or less unexamined, ruling values in composing their works. Of course, the dissenting or revolutionary artist is also in danger of arrest, persecution, or ostracism from sources of livelihood and outlets which provide recognition and influence. An alternative course of dissent from ruling-class values is more implicit: the artist may choose to put up an "ivory tower" as a rejection of market enticements or demands, and also of involvement with an overtly ideological stance of dissent. The problem is that the context of alienated social conditions creeps into the work anyway, as numerous examples of "ivory tower" art testify. Whether a "rebel" or a "formalist", then, the artist opposed to ruling-class values bears some cost for living when he does. It is a cost of different complexion from that chargeable to artists who acquiesce in ruling-class values. We could call the "rebels" the counter-alienated. They are not reinforcers of the status quo values, or not of all of them. But in striving for ideological clarity and an ethical rigour, they risk neglect of some of the residual resources of art. The "ivory tower" artist runs another type of risk, if also related to the specific matter of which art is composed: by turning away from the study of social relations, this artist often impoverishes his result; and the thinness of its content may even be set off with lumps of undigested, random ideology.

Considering ways in which residual resources of aesthetic objects can be misshapen, it is important to note that Marx and Engels approached class values present in works by individual authors in terms equally applicable, for instance, to texts by scholars or journalists. At the level of "content" explication the medium's distinctive traits were set aside. Yet these traits and their vulnerability were mentioned at a more general plane, when they did analyze particular works of art in light of the entirety

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of the alienation diagnostic: for instance, more than once they suggested that an aggressively ideological clarity in anti-establishment poetry disturbed the structural autotelicism. Or take the much-quoted passage from Marx on the enduring values of ancient Greek art (in the *Contribution*) which says that the truths of that day must be reproduced in our own art at a higher plane. By truth (*seine Wahrheit zu reproduzieren*) in art we may be certain that Marx did not mean an ideologically guiding or, again, a "proletarian" art. With its commitment to arduous political goals and even to tactically detailed tasks, such art would better be seen as a means of preparing for change, prior to and for a short while after a politico-economic revolution. The vindication of its "hoarseness of voice"—to use Brecht's phrase about some of his own writing in his poem "To Posterity"—the ultimate triumph and also eclipse of this art would lie in the aid it lent to introducing postalienational conditions, where truth might be embodied effortlessly at a high plane by the specific resources of art, to assume a durable place beside the still aesthetically compelling works of antiquity.

If Marx and Engels assumed a certain neglect of the available potential for aesthetic specificity by much "rebel" art, they believed that alienation ate all the more corrosively even into ambitious art which broadly corresponded to the attitudes, interests, or habits of thought of a modern ruling class. The term "class equivalent" is especially useful in describing attributes of art which, whether unwittingly or lazily, take their impress from the dominant values fostered by a class having power: for the transference from model to receptive medium is the less laboured and the more direct. The term "class equivalent" originated with Georgi Plekhanov, the father of Russian Marxism, but Marx and Engels often discerned the phenomenon, describing in extended texts or in letters how an artist's stated or implied values were equivalent to aspects of the ideology of a social class. These connections were founded on explicit evidence in a work of art—never on mere reference to a writer's or artist's class of origin, which would have been reductive. When they discerned a socio-historical equivalent, how did they categorize it? Usually in one of these ways:

1. The work could be associated with the consciously held, comprehensive world view of a broad historical class (see for example the texts on Aeschylus and Chateaubriand).

2. Even more broadly, the work could be associated with the hegemonic ideology of the era (Engels on Dante or on medieval poetry, Marx on German Reformation literature).

3. The work could more restrictively be attributed to a single political position (the equivalence of Heine or *Junges Deutschland* to a particular perception of German events).

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The more narrow characterization was reserved usually—not surprisingly, either—for works that were relevant to recent national politics. The immediacy of the political ideology in art and literature also led to application of the major class categories “bourgeois” and “proletarian” more broadly. From the standpoint of changing social attitudes among artists, too, the politicized perception of the equivalents in recent works was justified. For artists in the nineteenth century were taking sides more, sympathized with a political party, or joined “the party of Art”. The art for art’s sake movement is not specifically mentioned by Marx or by Engels. Yet, they surely were aware of its conception. Indirectly, they disparaged it when they spoke of sophisticated egotistical art meant for a restricted circle. While Marx and Engels seem to have found *l’art pour l’art* hostile to the alienating conditions, they did not applaud its solution. If my interpretation is correct, they likened aesthetes such as Max Stirner to the Romantic movement, which they disapproved. If an either-or choice of the class affinities demonstrated by the anti-ideological aesthetes had to be made, undoubtedly Marx and Engels linked them more closely with the bourgeois than with proletarian values. The scorn stated by *l’art pour l’art* for the philistinism and class egotism of the bourgeoisie would not have been a sufficient counter-argument—which is only to recognize that the crucial choice in the Marxian philosophy of history was not between philistine accumulation and expertise, nor even between property and culture, but rather the choice had to be taken on a larger basis: one which might see property and philistinism and the cultural inheritance and contemporary art, chiefly organized for the benefit of a single one of the confronting sides. Ultimately the choice for any person lay between, on the one hand, the ruling class which jealously defended its power to own, to oppress, inherit, and exploit, and on the other hand, the most oppressed class, the working class, whose successful struggle for liberation would mean the abolition of class society and of alienation and, consequently, the full solution to the aspects of alienation which *l’art pour l’art* had cleverly but inadequately evaded, along with the solution of the misshaping oppression and exploitation endemic to class-divided societies through all recorded history.

However, while Marx and Engels made their ultimate contemporary value-choices in terms of the conflict of the bourgeoisie and proletariat, they often used a more particularized social categorization, and this also was true of their approach to class values in art. According to the artistic matter at hand, they might speak of the shopkeepers’ literary representative, or of the involuted, class-contradictory ideas of a complex artist such as Goethe. On the whole their use of class analysis is sensitive and flexible, and it is oriented to the work of art. Nor should we look away

from the fact that by no means did they make class values the main focus of their attention to art. Let us consider a case of their flexibility in applying the developed categories: the letter from Engels to Paul Ernst, dated June 5, 1890, in which Engels replies to this young Social-Democrat's propositions on the class nature of Scandinavian literature and of Ibsen in particular. Engels carefully distinguishes between the petty-bourgeoisie in Germany and in Norway—this same class in Norway, he argues, plays a far more positive historical rôle, which in turn contributes to the vitality of Scandinavian writing. Their historicist methodology prevailed, not a blind application of dominant themes.

Historicist sensitivity is also evident in the observations of Marx and Engels on the category of the tragical. They apply the notion of tragedy to a drama about premature revolution (the *Sickingen* correspondence), but also to an ailing class regime that quixotically hopes to maintain its dignity (Marx's "Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*", 1843). These observations on tragedy, by the way, were never put forward by them in the trappings of a fully developed theory. The ambiguity of its possible further development remains. The treatment of *Sickingen* suggests that tragical clash is inevitable when an epochal historical initiative met by practical class impossibility is turned back; another version of this impasse is seen in the tragicomedy of Quixote, where the initiative comes from the representative of a class whose dominance has passed. Further, the *Sickingen* discussion turns on an institution which readily defeats the prophetic impertinences of an individual; while the Quixote instance posits the values of two class institutions in conflict. If Marx and Engels had developed these discussions further, their unity might have become evident—but left as they were, we necessarily have questions which beg for answers. Among them: to what extent and how were these clashes compelled by objective history? To what extent, if at all, may the consciousness of individuals be thought capable of indeed transcending historical contexts (and thus give the "tragical" awareness to historical conduct and the compelling necessity to the clash)? If the latter can occur, then the Marxian category of the tragical would lie not in epochal necessities which majestically conflict (Hegel's version), but in the defeat by institutionalized objectives of an individual challenge that points to a new era. In other words: the tragedy would not merely consist of two conflicting classes whose embodying protagonists clash (objective meshing of epochs of class history), instead tragedy would lie in the somewhat quixotic yet heroic "vanguard" whose prescience and boldness to act expose it to personal destruction by representatives of the ruling class. Perhaps the ambiguity can be resolved along such lines.

But as the texts we have stand, much less than an aesthetic category of

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the tragical is presented—and the Eastern European Marxists, who would offer a comprehensive formulation from the insufficient arguments in Marx and Engels, while insensitively failing to deal with the further aesthetic problems, do a disservice. On the other hand, there are no grounds for accepting George Steiner's assertion in *The Death of Tragedy* (1961) that Marxian philosophy removes the basis for tragedy. For Marx's view of the clashes between epochal values, with humiliation and destruction awaiting those which arrive too early or depart too late, promises to remain relevant for the foreseeable future of socialist developments, as the statements in *The German Ideology* on the early phase of communism also suggest. Again, this argument was made by A. Lunacharsky, later the Commissioner of Education under Lenin, as early as 1908 (Steiner, by the way, credits Lunacharsky with just the opposite view, one supporting the "death" of tragedy). It is true that some minor Soviet writers after World War II maintained the theory that socialist society was free of major conflicts, but this Panglossian attitude cannot be ranked beside the Marxian understanding of the social and aesthetic sources of tragedy.

To wind up this section, we may note that either of two Marxian emphases can be given to interpretation of the class conditioning of artistic values. In the more deterministic sense, this notion means that the expression of the work of art will conform to the ideology of a particular class, as imposed upon and mediated by the artist. A more comprehensive interpretation will find that the class conditioning of artistic values primarily occurs—or at least most profoundly occurs—where epochal class conflicts are depicted with lucid and deft control by artists who have an exceptional awareness of the historical framework and the dynamic of the tale they would tell. This more adequate, and more aesthetically understood, Marxian idea of the class determinates of major art brings us to the question of realism as an aesthetic category.

### d. *The Problem of Realism*

By its standard of authentic portrayal of reality in art, Marxian aesthetic thought gains its chief verification of class-determined art in the narrower first sense discussed above. If art can render the true and determinate historical cross-section and dynamic of reality, then the departures from this capacity shall be known by the bias of their discrepancies.

The term "realism" does not appear in any text by Marx. Yet, there is no doubt, after his comments on the Sue novel, the Lassalle play, and the great nineteenth-century novelists, that Marx agreed with the general conception formulated by Engels in his letters to Minna Kautsky and Margaret Harkness. Realism can be described as the artistic-cognitive value of an artwork. That their notion of the cognitive equivalent was

broad than the overt ideological equivalent is shown in their discussion of Balzac. It baldly asserts that an artist can "see", i.e., perceive, more than even his own, vaunted ideological standpoint encourages. Undoubtedly, the freedom which is implied in the ability to embody cognitive equivalents will be tempered by certain fixed ideas about contemporary class virtues and failings. Yet, the narrower sense of class values is excluded from predominating in artistic cognition which can be called realism. Balzac's royalist leanings did not prevent him as a novelist from portraying contemporary French society with a breadth and acuity which offered a major indictment of royalist politics.

Whether a work achieved authentic realism was not to be judged, then, from the standpoint of "progressive" or "reactionary" class values that might be lodged in it, as such. Rather, such values, if present, were another although related issue. Authenticity of realism was to be achieved by, and judged by, the expression of a cognitive equivalent: specifically, the dominant and typical traits of socially conflicted life in a particular place and time. *Typicality* is thus a key consideration. An historically typical situation is at least partly unlike any previous historical moment, and it has to be bodied forth with freshness of character and event. This means individuality and specificity are an integral aspect of typicality. But with the appreciation of fidelity to detail goes a decisive attention to typical characteristics of life in a time and place. (The literary field, of course, provided the model for realism as an aesthetic category—Marx and Engels both turned to literature as their source of examples and their preference of all the arts. Their remarks on painting are few, but these suggest a similar standard for realism in painting: see Marx's comments on Rembrandt, or Engels' letter to Marx of May 20, 1857, admiring the portrait of Ariosto by Titian.) A guiding adjunct to their postulate of typicality is found in Marx's comment (*Capital*, vol. III) that history must be understood by expecting "many variations and gradations"—no single model for typicality may be advanced.

Realism was explicitly addressed and explored as a dominant theme of Marx and Engels; this does not mean they left no ambiguities in their approach, as we have it documented. Nor can we regard realism as their ultimate priority of concern in the arts, or, for that matter, as virtually their sole contribution to aesthetic thought—as various authors want to maintain. Among the lacunae left by their thought on realism: did Marx and Engels feel that typicality of both characters and circumstances must optimally appear in a realist work? Or could one have atypical characters in typical circumstances? And typical characters in atypical circumstances? Writing to Minna Kautsky in 1885, Engels stressed typicality of both characters and setting; but writing to M. Harkness in 1888, Engels seems to accept that typical figures can occur in rather



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exceptional circumstances, without leaving the category of realism. It might be possible to conclude that the norm of superior realism will be a fresh and specified typicality of both characters and setting; one might want to rank realist works in respect to their degree of typification.

Another area needing further study is that of the relation of an author's world view—the ideology—to the artistic-cognitive values of a work. In the Balzac instance, Marx and Engels found a complete discrepancy: on the one hand, the novels with their artistic-cognitive realism, and on the other, Balzac's ideological opinions as confirmed by non-art sources. However, a different relationship was found by Engels in Goethe's work, which sometimes was artistic-cognitive on a grand scale, and sometimes was merely ideological and inartistic. Goethe could be Olympian and philistine by turns. At the opposite remove from Balzac was Eugène Sue, whose work was entirely ideological: *The Mysteries of Paris* swallowed the world, its concreteness and typicality, and gave the reader only the writer's world view, with an opinionated fixity which obliterated nearly all sources in cognition. These three treatments by Marx and Engels may be taken to suggest the full scale of relations between world view and artistic cognition. There are numerous works an analysis of which would further refine the scale.

How did they judge the worth of ideology in a work of art, in relation to the worth of artistic cognition? Marx and Engels rejected the ubiquity of a world view, as such, in a long work of fiction such as *The Mysteries of Paris* or, for that matter, in the play Lassalle had written. Engels advised Minna Kautsky in the letter earlier cited that it was better for the author's opinions to be hidden away; a reader might better draw his own conclusions about the cognitive representation. Fully achieved works of art, they seemed to believe, will find means of avoiding the imposition of a discursive outlook on the public. This reluctance to admit ideology to a central place in artistic realism is complementary to their notion of a relative autonomy, or autotelicism, of the artistic medium—which provides a distinctive trait of artistic objects, and is realized only owing to their specific values and attributes. Ideology, as such, is not a trait distinctive to art.

A dynamic typicality, on the other hand, may be wholly expressed by the non-discursive means of mimetic art. We can still ask questions about aspects of the dynamic factor which are not clear in the texts we have. For instance, will a fully achieved realism always put the dynamic emphasis on socially emerging situations and characters? Or is it reasonable to represent the dynamics of decay? The Engels letter to Harkness makes it definite that the classical texts of Marxian aesthetic thought are very far from laying down regulations for every eventuality. Harkness had emphasized a prolonged lapse of English workers from militancy. Engels

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responded with a question rather than a directive: "And how do I know whether you have not had very good reasons for contenting yourself for once with a picture of the passive side of working class life, reserving the active side for another work?"

#### *e. Tendency Writing*

The artistic cognition of the typical and dynamic aspects of real life was thought to be not only better art but also better testimony on behalf of the socialist movement, than could be supplied by the artist's world view as such. However, the depiction of the socially emergent forces of history was relevant to art in other modes than the realist medium alone with its special requirements.

When the artist consciously and overtly projected in art the idea of socialism as the emergent force of history, the source of the artistic aim might have been in direct cognition of reality or it might have been in ideology (and secondarily in cognitive inquiry): but the result, for art, was emphasis foremostly on world view, supported in its appeal by various artistically attractive qualities of the work, such as rhythm, irony, variation, etc., with confirming mimetic detail taking a subordinate place. The outcome of orienting world view to the projection of a vision of history, moreover, was to achieve an artistically more dynamic medium than ideological expression often could find. Realism was of course not in question. Instead another dominant theme of Marx and Engels came to the fore: "tendency" writing, the projection by essentially discursive yet poeticized means of an idea of history and of the attitude, feelings, conflicts, etc., of the artistic personality (the author) about this idea. Obviously, the personal essay, the reflective or ironic poem, the expressionist play are more suitable mediums for "tendency" writing than are the major realistic mediums, such as the novel and film.

"Tendency" writing, or tendentiousness, was a phenomenon of the 1840s in Germany, leading up to the 1848 Revolution, and, as such, Marx and Engels were much exposed to it, particularly in their youth. It has reappeared in many other contexts, often with other names being applied, such as "committed writing" recently. This is perhaps the principal mode of "rebel" art referred to in our discussion of alienation and disalienation. Its world view is guided by the hope for disalienation; it is generally an insistently politicized art, committed to depicting and provoking struggle against the established order that governs society.

As realism was described by Engels to Minna Kautsky, its goal is to embody the innate dialectics of social reality. It hints, if often broadly, at the trend or tendency of development active spontaneously in history. Repeatedly, Marx and Engels demarcated these latent cognitions of the tendency of social development from *l'art engagé*, with its explicit and

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didactic "tendentiousness". The latter was conceived from a consistent ideological position. Realism might be coherent in its underlying, peculiarly artistic cognition, or it might arise chaotically from a hodge-podge of conceptions, but the trend in events was latently not didactically given. While tendentious art has a positive goal to be gained, much realism emerges from a strong oppositional attitude towards contemporary social alienation which lacks a focused positive aspiration. The distinction can become blurred, art may be intensely realistic in part and prescriptive in part—Brecht's *Days of the Commune* for instance. The point to be made is that art which expresses the dynamic of history may emphasize either a univocal worldview and a directed response from the audience, or an ambivalent and multivocal artistic realism which invites the audience to arrive at an opinion of the representation.

The above formulations may make it seem that Marx and Engels were not happy with "tendency" writing—but this is by no means a general rule. For instance, the remarkable poet Heinrich Heine was a personal friend of Marx; Marx and Engels were delighted to have this political ally whose ideas, whose likes and dislikes stood out so forcefully in his verses. When in later years Heine became a backslider, they remonstrated with him—not because he was tendentious in honour of elements of established religion and order, but because of his poor (opportunistic) choice of ideology he expressed. Similarly, the admired poet Ferdinand Freiligrath was welcomed by Marx and Engels to the party press. Marx commented to the poet, in a letter of February 29, 1860, that his tendentiousness had given splendid expression to the emergent social rôle of the proletariat, though Freiligrath had kept a distance between himself and the party with its politics and tactics; Marx emphasized the *Tendenz* inherent to all truthful creation. And in an article on the poet Georg Weerth of June 1883, Engels praised the way in which Weerth had been able to give prominence to the growing rôle of the working class in politics and society. Heine, Freiligrath, Weerth—these were "tendency" poets, not realistic fiction writers; they spoke in their own voice, or in ballads, but with virtuoso intelligence and emotion and aesthetic elaboration and innovation of language. The expression of their artistic individuality offered the basis of a due autotelicism to the work, which the audience might confront with the "distance" and "freedom" that Marx mentioned in the 1844 *Manuscripts* as necessary to the human creative attitude.

A word should be added to differentiate the position of Marx and Engels on *Tendenzkunst* from Lenin's idea of *partiinost*, a party-spirited literature. The distinction has been confused by Mikhail Lifshitz and other authors. Lenin makes a number of points in "Party Organization and Party Literature", the key text, which mostly centres on the party as a political vanguard and the artists who choose to become members of this

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organization. The question of discipline was very important for Lenin; for Marx it was not. Of course, Marx wished for an enduring understanding of artists for working people and their party, and he welcomed "tendency" writing which with artistic brilliance pointed to the dynamic of history as he and this party understood it. However, Marx approached the artistic problems of depicting the tendency in social life very much as the artists themselves faced them—not with an invocation of discipline, but with concern for theme, character and setting, and the possible appearance of the personality of the artist in his work. It's not accidental, I believe, that no recorded opinion of Marx on the need or likelihood of a proletarian art is extant, nor can his opinion be extrapolated from available texts with any certainty; while Lenin, although reserved personally in his attitude, presided over the "hothouse" emergence (as a party resolution of 1924 alluded to it) of a "proletarian" group of party literary intellectuals; this was the nucleus which a few years after Lenin's death would take charge of what now is termed the Stalin era in Soviet literature.

#### *f. Expression of Fundamental Human Values in Art*

Seeing the question already arise at several preceding points as to where Marx and Engels actually placed the greater priority among various values relevant to the making of art, we can now try to settle the problem. We can most usefully introduce here Marx's famous thoughts on the enduring character of ancient Greek art.

What emerges from the question of priorities and that of the trans-historical character of Greek aesthetic achievements, if carefully synthesized, is another dominant theme: Marx's and Engels' idea of fundamental human values, which are equivalent to certain values expressed in art.

The fundamental human equivalents—those which are most trans-historical, most universally human—are only discussed by Marx directly in a single text, part of his analysis of *Fleur de Marie*, a prominent character in the Sue novel *Mysteries of Paris*. *Fleur de Marie* is said by Marx to have a vitality that goes beyond her bourgeois context and that forces its way through the clumsy moralizing imposed on the human subject-matter by Sue himself. Sue gives her example of *joie de vivre* something like a true embodiment.

Indirectly, Marx touches on fundamental human equivalents throughout his aesthetic thought. This is the necessary background to his all-out search for the means of social disalienation (which assumes a fundamental human potential). The unfailing appreciation Marx shows for the expression in art of sturdy and robust sensuality (also praised by Engels in his Weerth article), indomitable will, resilient enthusiasm, and passionate intellectual powers, is seen in his comments on the works of Aeschylus or

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Shakespeare, for example.

How then shall we read the praise for the enduring glory of Greek art? I believe it may be interpreted much in the way Max Raphael has suggested, as (a) recognition for the formal harmonious attributes achieved by ancient art. Yet, there seem to be two further criteria in the passage which Marx thought important to the enduring character of art. (b) By its own specific means art can express the whole significance of the society (Greek art was sustained by a system of living myth based in the specific mode and level of economic activity). (c) This art expressed the highest human values, and thereby offered a tremendous affirmation of humanity. It seems that Marx believed both the latter attributes were particularly suited to the art of a "young" or naïve civilisation. It would be accurate to relate attribute (b) to artistic-cognitive value, and attribute (c) to fundamental human value. The cognitive and the fundamental human values mingle and are both dependent on attribute (a) which denotes the adequacy of form to the embodied values. And while we are making a full hierarchical scale, we should mention a progressive outlook as another criterion. Strictly speaking, this is an ideological equivalent. In the view of Marx and Engels, the criterion of progressive ideology cannot occur alone—for this value must be embodied with adequate formal expression, and moreover it is an expression of fundamental human value in another garb, as it were.

The hierarchy, or priority, of these enduring values was never deliberately settled by Marx or Engels; yet, as I indicated earlier, their aesthetic thought elaborates what we may accurately describe as a *Gehaltästhetik*, aesthetics oriented to content. Because "form" was less important to them than "content", and in light of Marx's unwavering attachment to the Greek example and to the ideal of disalienated humanity, I believe the top priority among the enduring values, for Marx and Engels, should be recognized as the fundamentally human value embodied in art. As for the priority of ideological value and cognitive value over formal value, a number of examples demonstrate it. There is the explicit comment by Engels to Lassalle in the 1859 correspondence, where Engels says he approached the *Sickingen* play with the highest standards, "aesthetic and historical". Historical here means, of course, cognitive and ideological criteria, and aesthetic means formal; distinctly the formal standard is brought in secondarily. The parallel letter by Marx is similar.

We should not conclude from the foregoing that form was of no interest to them, or that they took artistic realization for granted. On the contrary—their criticism of *Sickingen* was in substance as much artistic as ideological; they were basically dissatisfied with Lassalle's artistic skills, their reason for accusing him of "Schillerizing" (a pun on the German

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word for describing), i.e., the use of "mouthpiece" characters to utter the author's discursive thought, as well as in other ways substituting the orator's art for the craft of the artist. Nevertheless, readers may object that, in pursuing *Gehaltästhetik*, Marx and Engels did not display overmuch sensitivity to the specific problems of artistic form; they invoked these problems only cursorily, and without much interest. Driving this argument home, the reader may cite the fact that Lassalle's play strongly affected Marx and Engels although Lassalle, the lawyer and politician, was not a genuine artist. Engels was capable of sincerely praising the novels of M. Kautsky and M. Harkness which, while being mediocre works, now have some stature in the history of criticism due mainly to his admiration. Can we accept the above arguments all of which have been made in print? Not finally. The aesthetic sensibilities of Marx and Engels are more reliably judged by the passion and longevity of their responses to Shakespeare, Cervantes, Goethe, and Balzac; by the response of Engels to Ibsen and of Marx to the Greek dramatists—all in the original languages. We learn from Paul Lafargue's reminiscences that Marx also read and loved Pushkin, Gogol, and Schedrin in the native Russian; Franz Mehring comments on his liking for Scott and Fielding. As for the specific charges of bad taste lodged against them, it should be noted that, in extending some praise to Lassalle, they wanted to soften the blow of essentially severe criticisms, and Lassalle was their friend. Moreover, some of the praise was merited by the newness of Lassalle's project, and this applies also to Engels on Harkness and Kautsky. Surely, there is no shortage of serious critical thought extended to the novelty of works which, in their other dimensions, are perishable!

Let us suppose that Georg Büchner's drama *Danton's Death* had been known to them (it was not critically "discovered" until half a century later): Marx and Engels would have had an innovating text worthy in its formal values as much as in its ideological, cognitive and fundamentally human values of their most discriminating analysis. Alas, it was not to be. The authors with world views nearest to their own did not, on the whole, rise to the highest artistic challenge, or at least they did not in drama or long fiction which have been the eminent fields of realism. This left Marx and Engels with only older works to enjoy on a comprehensive scale of the enduring artistic values, and enjoy such works they certainly did. Marx himself wanted to write a drama about the Roman Gracchi, a revolutionary episode from the ancient world, we are told by Lafargue. In short, Marx and Engels took their fullest aesthetic pleasure where they could, and discussed the developing social and politically sympathetic drama and novel where they could.

Even with the merited recognition of their aesthetic responsiveness, however, we must conclude that they directed more attention to problems

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of *Gehaltästhetik* than to developing a formal interpretation. And they did regard form—which I take to be the primary constituent attribute of any work of art—in an instrumental fashion. That is to say, they often wrote as though it were a transparent if necessary value, which, if competently disposed, would permit the content (which had its own problems) to shine brightly through. On occasion—writing about style, or on Lassalle's drama—they did treat form as a translucent value, that is, with its compositional attributes or failings always apparent to the responding public or to critical analysis. Surely their concern for some novel problems of *Gehaltästhetik* took a toll on the equitably balanced approach we might have hoped from them. But the cost is offset, in a way, by their recurrent concern for the fundamentally human value, which they moreover saw to direct the attention of everyone attuned to aesthetic realization back onto the ultimate source of both present and potential harmonious formal value: that is to say, back onto the alienation and disalienation of the human species, in its basic characteristics and its astonishing, irrepressible desire for freedom and fulfilment.

A final word must be said on a point suggested above: the high regard that Marx and Engels had for originality, not only in the artistic-cognitive and ideological dimension, but also and strikingly in the stylistic dimension. This begins early: in the letter on style from Engels to W. Graber, and in Marx's response to the Prussian censorship. It is emphasized in the *Communist Manifesto* which speaks of communism as "an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all", a definition echoed in *Capital* where communism is termed "a higher type of society whose fundamental principle is the full and free development of every individual". The vision of the future era, as earlier discussed, includes the prospect of every person realizing his or her specific artistic aptitudes, which all will command. In short, it is communism alone that could bring out individual abilities and enable them to mature among the great majority whose lives had been stunted in previous societies. It is communism alone that could generate the best and most original results of aesthetic activity and the freest expressions of genius.

Yet, if individual style was among the chief values that they attributed to artistic achievement, I do not see how it may be introduced among the dominant themes—at least, on the terms set out for presenting the other dominant themes. Marx and Engels simply did not develop their thought on it as an aesthetic category. They did not specifically indicate how the presence of originality affects the whole of the aesthetic work, how it interrelates with the remaining chief values. I would not care to speculate about their thought in this matter, with so little to go on. Other areas of the aesthetic thought of Marx and Engels can be recognized, reconstructed,

interpolated and extrapolated. But here, the importance—and the lacunae—can only be acknowledged.

*V. Background to the Aesthetic Thought of Marx and Engels*

Inquiry and study as to the sources contributing to the aesthetic thought of Marx and Engels has begun. To this date, it has not been exhaustive.

In part for this reason, the scholars who address themselves to Marxian aesthetic thought have often accepted misstatements, or have relied on their own preconceptions; this in turn has led to misinterpretations, of three kinds. (a) One approach, typified by Lifshitz, almost wholly overlooks the influence of the history of aesthetics on the two men—that is to say, the idiogenetic sources of their aesthetic thought. Another mistaken approach, (b) that of Jezuitow and others, sees the development of the ideas of Marx and Engels on art as an “ontogenetic” repetition of the “philogenetic” pattern of change in German and European aesthetics from the late Enlightenment to Hegel. This is at least a quasi-idiogenetic interpretation in part, although schematized beyond the point of usefulness; another such is (c) that of Fridlender among others, who takes the dictum from Lenin that Marxism’s primary sources are the German classical philosophy, the English political economy, and the French utopian socialism, and applies this schema indiscriminately.

These hasty or confused approaches to the available evidence will not do. On the one hand, it is impossible to doubt the great importance which earlier aesthetic thought had for Marx and Engels; on the other hand, it must be patiently examined, to understand the specific extent and way in which this heritage was grasped by Marxian thought. Thorough empirical study is called for—and has been supplied, in great part, by a doctoral dissertation on the period from the Enlightenment through Schiller to Hegel by Stanislaw Pazura (“Marks a klasyczna estetyka niemiecka”, Warsaw, 1967). What is the evidence which Pazura turns up, and how should it be interpreted?

The parallels between the conceptions of Marx and those of German aesthetics in this period are prominent. In the letters of 1837 from Marx to his father and his reading excerpts to 1842 (*MEGA*, pp. 115-118) we can observe his intensive reading of the literature on aesthetics; indeed, Marx’s knowledge of it far surpasses what was to be expected of a philosophy student at the time. And Engels’ early writings convince us he had poured over the aesthetics of the “Young Germany” movement, which introduced him to the ideas of Lessing, Goethe and Schiller. We can also find evidence that Marx returned at various times—1851-52, 1857, 1874—to study the aesthetic heritage. There must have been many other occasions when Engels or Marx directly consulted the aesthetic tradition. This is not the place to itemise what is definitely known of their



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reading. But we may sketch in a general way how the dominant themes in their aesthetic thought compare with the "background" in their time.

This brings us to German classical aesthetics. To Hegel, of course. Yet, not only to Hegel as its "summit", as some have argued, but also to the stimulus of many earlier figures and many different modes. The admiration for Greek culture stems from Winckelmann. And an entire line in German philosophy points to the question of alienation. The fragmentation of modern life contrasted with the ideal of the rich, harmonious personality was discussed by Winckelmann, Kant, Schiller, and lesser writers (e.g., K. Heydenreich, M. Herz). Many authors believed that art could play the chief rôle in bringing about humanity's inner integration and full adaptation to the social world. Indeed, an excessive hope was often invested in art during this time in Germany. Even the most general speculative texts of the period sometimes contained an aesthetic anthropology: e.g., Fichte's Letters of 1794 ("Ueber Geist und Buchstab in der Philosophie"), or the anonymous essay "Das älteste System-Program des deutschen Idealismus" (1796, attributed by Cassirer to Hölderlin, by Walzel to F. Schlegel, by Allwohn and Zeltner to Schelling, and even to Hegel—see A. Nivelle, *Les Theories esthétiques en Allemagne de Baumgarten à Kant*, 1955). Much was also written on the dispiriting advances of alienation in art. For example, G. Forster's "Die Kunst und das Zeitalter", *Thalia*, no. 9, 1789; Fichte, *op. cit.*; A.W. Schlegel, Marx's teacher, "Briefe über Poesie, Silbenmass und Sprache", *Horen*, 1795; and finally, Hegel (his notion of the *Zerfallen der Kunst*, the decadence of art). Marx's contemporary, F.T. Vischer, continues this more or less Rousseauian trend, where he denounces the sterile, authoritarian, bureaucratic apparatus of capitalist society which destroys beauty and particularly degrades the aesthetic level of the working population (*Aesthetik*, 1846-57). What about the background to Marx's and Engels' treatment of the genesis of aesthetic sensibility and art in relation to labour? This is discussed earlier by A.W. Schlegel, who accorded a primordial rôle to rhythm which he traced to the natural and social relations of humanity in the material world. Schlegel also suggested that the artist-specialist was unknown in primitive society, and that the autonomization of art would have occurred at a later time. Marx undoubtedly knew Schiller's writing on this topic. Schiller had demarcated the senses of animals from a strictly human sensibility; the latter, more detached from an immersing reality, could become the basis of a *freie Ideenfolge* and the emergence of a *Spieltrieb* which, imparting to human activity and production a specificity of form, at last gave rise to the *ästhetischer Schein*. What of the attributes of the aesthetic object and aesthetic experience? Marx's thought incorporates Kant's *freies Spiel der Seelenkräfte*. However, the solution to this problem in respect to the

subject/object relationship—the notion of the harmony of the aesthetic object corresponding to the integral and autotelic character of the aesthetic experience—was indicated by Heydenreich, Herz, and Schiller. And it was a common-enough solution; witness K. Chr. F. Krause's *Abriss der Aesthetik* (1837). There is no question that the 1844 *Manuscripts* use notions and even phrasings identical with those of Feuerbach in *The Essence of Christianity* (1841). What about the emphasis on *Gehaltästhetik*? Major attention to "content" extends from Schiller through Hegel to the young Vischer, and, of course, to *Junges Deutschland*. And Marx and Engels stood with the "Young Germany" movement in rejecting Hegel's expectation of a permanent decline of art, while from the same source they learned to understand and appreciate a politically committed art. On the other hand, from Vischer (*Aesthetik*) they could gain the notion that beauty is possessed of its own tendency, contained in the art work. Hegel's immediate influence is especially felt in the references by Marx to the comic and tragic, to the enduring glory of Greek art, and to the typical, a concept at the centre of the realism of Marx and Engels. Thus, German classical aesthetics may be considered the primary source of their aesthetic thought.

Yet, we should notice that other European traditions of thought were available. Notions of alienation and disalienation in the writings of Rousseau and the French utopian Socialists could easily have influenced the thinking of Marx and Engels. Diderot, too, had located the genesis of art in the work processes; the prevailing German notion of realism which centred on the principle of *das Einzelne im Allgemeinen* (*das Besondere*), was profoundly modified by ideas of the hero typifying a social situation (Diderot and Lessing), by the prefaces Balzac wrote to his novels, by the literary and artistic movement in the 1840s and 1850s—G. Sand, Courbet, Champfleury, such English novelists as Dickens and Thackeray. At a later date, the controversy over Zola and the naturalist novel provides a setting for Engels' letters on realism; and his emphasis on a realistic "truth of detail" cannot be divorced from his concern for a typicality of character and situation, directed against the naturalist enthusiasts—for example, his letter of December 13, 1883 to Laura Lafargue, where Engels declares the "revolutionary dialectics" of Balzac had taught him more about the history of France in 1815-48 than had the history books. As for class interpretation of art, the first, however tentative and faulty, stems from Mme. de Staël and the French *doctrinaires* (Guizot, Ballanche, de Barante). This is a lengthy account of resources and sources, and I must add that Marx, who was astonishingly erudite, would surely have looked behind the immediately available aesthetic tradition—much as he learned from it—to make the ideas of Plato, Aristotle, and Dürer a part of his intellectual preparation. On the other hand, he undoubtedly did not read

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all the authors cited above. Many of the ideas were in general intellectual circulation; he must have run across them in a number of ways.

That is the idiogenetic background to Marxian aesthetics. We have seen that this area of their work cannot be interpreted apart from an understanding of their general world view or philosophy. What were, in turn, the main non-aesthetic influences on the thought of Marx and Engels? Hegel's general philosophy helped indirectly shape the body of dominant themes, observations, and remarks; yet, despite the importance of them of such notions as *versinnlichter Geist*, *Weltzustand*, *das Typische*, the central formative influence simply cannot be awarded to Hegel alone. No less significant was the great philosophical movement toward an historicist perspective—commencing at the start of the eighteenth century with Vico, Montesquieu and Rousseau, Winckelmann and Herder, through the French *doctrinaires* and Hegel's philosophy of history to the English economists and French historians. Another non-aesthetic influence was the idea of modern progress which often brimmed with utopian enthusiasms. The revolutionary 1770s furthered this social and political ideology which evolved to combine the thirst for justice and the desire for community with a projection of better times either backwards to a dim past or forward to a distant future. The 1844 *Manuscripts* echo the sigh for a "noble savage" in a primeval unalienated past. Closely related was the idea of an integrated harmony between man and society in ancient Greece. Here Marx followed Winckelmann, Hölderlin, Hegel, and others. But for Marx the idea of better human conditions was chiefly oriented to the future—and here he and Engels stood in the tradition of Condorcet, Fichte, such eighteenth-century utopians as Morelly or Don Deschamp, and the industrial-utopians Saint Simon and Robert Owen.

The influence of the Romantic School merits a special discussion. Scholars have conclusively demonstrated that Marx and Engels independently started out as followers of this movement, only to reject it under Hegel's influence, as others also did. No German Romantic could cope with the devastating, unanswerable shafts launched by Hegel commencing with *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Thus Marx decided, with Bruno Bauer, also active in Young Hegelian circles, to write a sardonic attack on Romantic art. It had become Marx's conviction that Romanticism was in league with religious art and its attendant ideology which at that time were his major targets for attack. This insensitivity to the aesthetic values of the Middle Ages was reinforced by his reading of De Brosses, Grund, Ruhmor and others. He echoed their words about the alleged barbarism of Gothic style. The same hostility motivated Marx's and Engels' hard words against Carlyle in 1850. The contrast to the deformed sickly medieval art was the antique art of Greece, which Marx

pronounced healthy and normal and never ceased to admire as the ideal of beauty. In later letters to Engels, Marx sarcastically ridiculed the style of Chateaubriand as a concatenation of vanity and false profundity, Byzantine exaggeration and polite sentimentalism. However, it has to be noted that Chateaubriand's characteristics are not a summation of the Romantic School. That movement also contained Byron and Shelley, for whom Marx and Engels held great respect. There is little doubt that they made a distinction between "Philistine" Romanticism and a plebeian and folklore-oriented Romanticism. Also, with the passing of years, they found more to value in medieval art and craftsmanship. During the very days that he corrected proof on *Capital*, Marx passed his spare hours enjoying the "dreams, frenzy, illusions" of the Spanish Catholic playwright Calderón. Their interest was caught by the brilliant inventions of German Romantics like Chamisso and E.T.A. Hoffmann (as pointed out earlier, they placed great value in individuality of style in art). In sum—Marx and Engels fought tenaciously against the *romantische Schule* in philosophy, ideology, and aesthetics, against Schelling and Solger. In the context of the intellectual currents of the early 1840s, they certainly were anti-Romantics. However, in a broader sense, Marx and Engels were cradled by Romanticism. This movement suffused all sides of the controversies of the day; it was the matrix in which antinomies were framed. How does the influence appear? It can be discovered in the way they structured questions about: (a) the egotistical freedom of the artist vs. his responsibility to nation, society, and humanity; (b) the artist as a lonely virtuoso of beauty or perhaps an acolyte of eternal truth vs. his revolutionary obligation or commitment; (c) a specifically aesthetic function of art vs. cognitive and moral functions; (d) unbridled individualist fantasy vs. the obedience of art to definite laws of the spirit or of nature; (e) *aut delectare aut prodesse* [either to delight or to be of use (Horace, *Art of Poetry*)]. It is obvious that Marx and Engels could not be content with the typical manner of posing questions at that time—but it was another matter to shake off entirely the effects of this mode of antinomy.

This has been the catalogue of what Marx and Engels accepted from their background and critically assimilated into their intellectual system. What they rejected is also important, and a sketch of their negative choices is instructive. Directly or indirectly, Marx and Engels attacked the objective idealism of Krause, Weisse, and Hegel, and the subjective idealism of Kant, Fichte, the *romantische Schule*. They rejected the art for art's sake doctrine, and equally, or nearly so, they opposed a banal didacticism. While respecting the value of form, they opposed formalism. They did not disclaim the presence of a natural impulsion underlying aesthetic experience, but they did not agree with the naturalistic notion

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that a specific aesthetic instinct was common both to man and other animals.

### VI. Conclusion

The panorama of the indirect and the immediate, the possible and the explicit sources and resources is immense. A reader could easily but too hastily conclude that Marx and Engels themselves must have, in their own right, contributed little or nothing to the history of aesthetic thought. Indeed, the attempt has been made by a number of Western scholars on the subject to compress most of their concepts into Hegel and the French realist doctrine of the 1850s. Among some Soviet scholars a comparable tendency more or less identifies Marxian thought with the views of Belinsky or Chernyshevsky. Either way, an impermissibly narrow and selective use of data occurs.

I have tried here to reconstruct Marxian aesthetic thought in its integrity, yet with a minimum recourse to extrapolation, accepting and mindful of the limits of using an outline approach, one which separates the texts into a documentary entity apart.

What emerges from this attempt at interpretation? I do not find the entire Marxian aesthetic contribution reducible to the sum of its sources; nor do I find its parts interchangeable with other, parallel formulations. What does this mean for Marx's and Engels' notion of alienation and disalienation? Well, they formulated this problem in an entirely new way, and Marx's philosophy of history is the ultimate reason for its originality. What else is new in this approach? Marx and Engels contributed to a new understanding of the priorities among the values embodied by art. They found a new solution to the old dilemma which saw art at once dying out and providing hope and comfort to a presently suffering humanity. The achievement of *homo aestheticus* could be anticipated, Marx thought, but a radical socio-political change in the situation of the species would be required. In this particular sense, the artist had to make a choice. Would he bemuse himself in an ivory tower, or participate in revolutionary progress by accepting its vicissitudes? Tendentiousness acquires a new meaning in Marx and Engels, not found among their forerunners. *Tendenz* is recast in the context of the Marxian world view, and historical reality itself is described as "tendentious". And this modifies the question of realism. The Hegelian notion of a type depicted in specific circumstances (*ein dieser*) is accepted, but they introduce to realism an awareness of the socially emergent elements. Ideology here comes to be considered a component of artistic choice and discrimination. The nature of a profound and true tendentiousness is to further refine and shape the artistic-cognitive values united within the aesthetic entity. Or again, the genesis of aesthetic sensibility is newly interpreted by reference to dialectical and

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historical materialism. And the transformation of *homo faber* into *homo ludens* is seen as a profoundly social phenomenon, so much so that even the process of art's autonomization has to be seen historically. The dominant theme of class equivalents of art, we know, has been accepted universally as a Marxian emphasis; and while the class dimension of art had been observed earlier, Marx and Engels were the first ones to see it in its proper dimension and to explore the complexities. In conclusion, I believe that it is now apparent that the dominant themes of Marx and Engels presented new issues for nineteenth-century aesthetics.

Needless to say, they could not lift themselves above the horizon of their time which defined the decisive issues for them. In this sense, their sympathy for realism is symptomatic—and yet, I must add that, nowhere in their work did Marx and Engels declare themselves against any alternative methods and solutions for art.

From another aspect, too, they were unable to deal with all the fundamental problems of aesthetics we would like to see treated. They were not professionals in the field. Also, and this is more basic, they adopted a concrete and selective approach to the problems of art. From this standpoint, the omissions or lacunae we find among their aesthetic ideas are as revealing as the contributions we see to have originated with them.

Accordingly, to suggest that Marx and Engels provided a rounded, balanced aesthetic theory would be incorrect. On the other hand, to dismiss their ideas as fortuitous or incidental speculations, or as utterances of mere taste and preference, would be just as irresponsible. I think that the reconstruction demonstrates how these aesthetic ideas have an internal coherence, not disrupted by any serious inconsistency. With a well-developed philosophy centering on several dominant themes, the ideas are addressed to problems that are thought to rank among the most significant and fundamental according to all traditional aesthetic treatises up to today.

I want to be clear on this point. The body of the aesthetic thought of Marx and Engels is not all-encompassing, and ostensibly it centres on literary examples. No final or complete system is offered. However, the contribution which an aesthetic approach makes eludes definition by such a test. A proper standard would be the originality of the contribution in its own time, and its influence on theory, criticism, and even artistic creativity in the future. By this test, the aesthetic ideas of Marx and Engels have historical and theoretical importance.

# Origins and Traits of the Aesthetic Sensibility

MARX, from *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*

The animal is immediately identical with its life-activity. It does not distinguish itself from it. It is *its life-activity*. Man makes his life-activity itself the object of his will and of his consciousness. He has conscious life-activity. It is not a determination with which he directly merges. Conscious life-activity directly distinguishes man from animal life-activity...

Man (like the animal) lives on inorganic nature; and the more universal man is compared with an animal, the more universal is the sphere of inorganic nature on which he lives. Just as plants, animals, stones, air, light. etc., constitute a part of human consciousness in the realm of theory, partly as objects of natural science, partly as objects of art—his spiritual inorganic nature, spiritual nourishment which he must first prepare to make it palatable and digestible—so too in the realm of practice they constitute a part of human life and human activity...

In creating an *objective world* by his practical activity, in *working-up* inorganic nature, man proves himself a conscious species being, i.e., a being that treats the species as its own essential being, or that treats itself as a species being. Admittedly animals also produce. They build themselves nests and dwellings, like the bees, beavers, ants, etc. But an animal only produces what it immediately needs for itself or its young. It produces one-sidedly, while man produces universally. It produces only under the dominion of immediate physical need, while man produces even when he is free from physical need and only truly produces in freedom therefrom. An animal produces only itself, while man reproduces the whole of nature. An animal's product belongs immediately to its physical body, while man freely confronts his product. An animal forms things in accordance with the measure and the need of the species to which it belongs, while man knows how to produce in accordance with the measure of every species and knows how to apply everywhere the inherent measure to the object. Man, therefore, also forms things in accordance with the laws of beauty...

Just as music alone awakens in man the sense of music, and just as the most beautiful music conveys no meaning to the unmusical ear—is no object for it, because my object can only be the confirmation of one of my essential powers and can therefore only be so for me as my essential power exists for itself as a subjective capacity, because the meaning of an object for me goes only so far as *my* senses go (has only sense for a meaning corresponding to that object)—for this reason the *senses* of the social man are *other* senses than those of the non-social man. Only through the objectively unfolded richness of man's essential being is the

richness of subjective *human* sensibility (a musical ear, an eye for beauty of form—in short, *senses* capable of human gratifications, senses confirming themselves as essential powers of *man*) either cultivated or brought into being. For not only the five senses but also the so-called mental senses—the practical senses (will, love, etc.)—in a word, *human* sense—the humanness of the senses—comes to be by virtue of its object, by virtue of *humanized* nature. The *forming* of the five senses is a labour of the entire history of the world down to the present.

The *sense* caught up in crude practical need has only a *restricted* sense. For the starving man, it is not the human form of food that exists, but only its abstract being as food; it could just as well be there in its crudest form, and it would be impossible to say wherein this feeding-activity differs from that of *animals*. The care-burdened man in need has no sense for the finest play; the dealer in minerals sees only the mercantile value but not the beauty and the unique nature of the mineral: he has no mineralogical sense. Thus, the objectification of the human essence both in its theoretical and practical aspects is required to make man's *sense human*, as well as to create the *human sense* corresponding to the entire wealth of human and natural substance.

...

The nations which are still dazzled by the sensuous splendour of precious metals and are, therefore, still fetish-worshippers of metal money are not yet fully developed money-nations.

**MARX, from *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859)**

The great importance of metals in general in the direct process of production is due to the part they play as instrument of production. Apart from their scarcity, the great softness of gold and silver as compared with iron and even copper (in the hardened state in which it was used by the ancients), makes them unfit for that application and deprives them, therefore, to a great extent, of that property on which the use-value of metals is generally based. Useless as they are in the direct process of production, they are easily dispensed with as means of existence, as articles of consumption. For that reason any desired quantity of them may be absorbed by the social process of circulation without disturbing the processes of direct production and consumption. Their individual use-value does not come in conflict with their economic function. Furthermore, gold and silver are not only negatively superfluous, i.e. dispensable articles, but their aesthetic properties make them the natural material of luxury, ornamentation, splendour, festive occasions, in short,



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the positive form of abundance and wealth. They appear, in a way, as spontaneous light brought out from the underground world, since silver reflects all rays of light in their original combination, and gold only the colour of highest intensity, viz. red light. The sensation of colour is, generally speaking, the most popular form of aesthetic sense. The etymological connection between the names of the precious metals, and the relations of colours, in the different Indo-Germanic languages has been established by Jacob Grimm (see his *History of the German Language*)...<sup>37</sup>

Suppose we have a commodity whose use-value is that of a diamond. We cannot tell by looking at the diamond that it is a commodity. When it serves as a use-value, aesthetic or mechanical, on the breast of a harlot or in the hand of a glasscutter, it is a diamond and not a commodity.

### MARX, from *Capital* (1867)

First of all, labour is a process between man and nature. In this process man mediates, regulates and controls his material interchange with nature by means of his own activity. Confronting the materiality of nature, he is himself a force of nature. With the natural forces of his body, his arms and legs and head and hand, he acts to appropriate the materiality of nature in a form useful to his life. Thus acting upon nature outside of him, and changing it, he changes his own nature also. The potentials that slumber within his nature are developed; and he compels the play of these forces to do his bidding. We do not here refer to the initial and instinctual forms of labour, as found among animals. The situation whereby the labourer appears in the commodity market as the seller of his own labour-power is at an immeasurable remove from the stage at which human labour had still to cast off its first and instinctual form. We are positing labour of a form that is exclusively characteristic of *man*. The operations carried out by a spider resemble those of a weaver, and many a human architect is put to shame by the bee in the construction of its wax cells. However, the poorest architect is categorically distinguished from the best of bees by the fact that before he builds a cell in wax, he has built it in his head. The result achieved at the end of a labour process was already present at its commencement, in the *imagination of the worker, in its ideal form*. More than merely working an *alteration* in the form of nature, he also

<sup>37</sup> One of the two "Brothers Grimm" (1785-1863), best known for their collection of fairy tales, less well known as folklorists and philologists. The volume to which Marx refers was published in 1848.

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*knowingly works his own purposes into nature; and these purposes are the law determining the ways and means of his activity, so that his will must be adjusted to them. Nor is this adjustment a fleeting act. Both the exertion of the labouring organs and the purposeful will, evident as attentiveness, are required during the entirety of the work. The more so, the less that the innate content of the work and the ways and means of its realization are attractive to the worker; the less, therefore, that he enjoys the work as a play of his own physical and psychic powers.*

#### **ENGELS, from *The Part Played by Labour in the Transition From Ape to Man* (1876)**

Labour is the source of all wealth, the political economists assert. It is this, next to nature, which supplies it with the material that it converts into wealth. But it is even infinitely more than this. Labour is the prime basic condition for all human existence, and this to such an extent that, in a sense, we have to say that labour created man himself...

Many monkeys use their hands to build nests for themselves in the trees or even, like the chimpanzee, to construct roofs between the branches for protection against the weather. With their hands they seize hold of clubs to defend themselves against enemies, or bombard the latter with fruits and stones. In captivity, they carry out with their hands a number of simple operations copied from human beings. But it is just here that one sees how great is the distance between the undeveloped hand of even the most anthropoid of apes and the human hand that has been highly perfected by the labour of hundreds of thousands of years. The number and general arrangement of the bones and muscles are the same in both; but the hand of the lowest savage can perform hundreds of operations that no monkey's hand can imitate. No simian hand has ever fashioned even the crudest of stone knives.

At first, therefore, the operations for which our ancestors gradually learned to adapt their hands during the many thousands of years of transition from ape to man could have been only very simple. The lowest savages, even those in whom a regression to a more animal-like condition with a simultaneous physical degeneration can be assumed to have occurred, are nevertheless far superior to these transitional beings. Before the first flint was fashioned into a knife by human hands, a period of time may have elapsed in comparison with which the historical period known to us appears insignificant, but the decisive step was taken: *the hand had become free* and could henceforth attain ever greater dexterity and skill, and the greater flexibility thus acquired was inherited and increased from generation to generation.

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Thus the hand is not only the organ of labour, *it is also the product of labour*. Only by labour, by adaptation to ever new operations, by inheritance of the thus acquired special development of muscles, ligaments and, over longer periods of time, bones as well, and by the ever-renewed employment of this inherited finesse in new, more and more complicated operations, has the human hand attained the high degree of perfection that has enabled it to conjure into being the paintings of a Raphael, the statues of a Thorwaldsen, the music of a Paganini...<sup>38</sup>

First labour, after it and then with it, speech—these were the two most essential stimuli under the influence of which the brain of the ape gradually changed into that of man, which for all its similarity is far larger and more perfect. Hand in hand with the development of the brain went the development of its most immediate instruments—the sense organs. Just as the gradual development of speech is necessarily accompanied by a corresponding refinement of the organ of hearing, so the development of the brain as a whole is accompanied by a refinement of all the senses. The eagle sees much farther than man, but the human eye sees considerably more things than does the eye of the eagle. The dog has a far keener sense of smell than man, but it does not distinguish a hundredth part of the odours that for man are definite signs of denoting different things. And the sense of touch, which the ape hardly possesses in its crudest initial form, has been developed only side by side with the development of the human hand itself, through the medium of labour...

By the cooperation of hands, organs of speech and brain, not only in each individual but also in society, human beings became capable of executing more and more complicated operations, and of setting for themselves and achieving higher and higher aims. With each generation labour itself became different, more perfect, more diversified. Agriculture was added to hunting and cattle raising; then spinning, weaving, metalworking, pottery and navigation. Along with trade and industry, art and science finally appeared. Nations and states developed from tribes. Law and politics arose, and with them the fantastic mirror image of human things in the human mind: religion. In the face of all these creations, which appeared in the first place as products of the mind and which seemed to dominate human societies, the more modest productions of the working hand retreated into the background, the more so since the mind that planned the labour already at a very early stage of development of society (for example, already in the primitive family) was able to have

<sup>38</sup> All examples of superlative artists: Raffaello Santi (1483-1520), Italian painter; Bertel Thorwaldsen (1770-1844), Danish sculptor; and Niccolò Paganini (1782-1840), Italian violinist.

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the labour that had been planned carried out by other hands than its own. All merit for the swift advance of civilisation was ascribed to the mind, to the development and activity of the brain. Men became accustomed to explaining their actions from their thoughts instead of from their needs (which in any case are reflected, come to consciousness in the mind)—and so there arose in the course of time that idealistic outlook on the world which, especially since the end of the ancient world, has dominated men's minds. It still rules them to such a degree that even the most materialistic natural scientists of the Darwinian school<sup>39</sup> are still unable to form any clear idea of the origin of man, because under this ideological influence they do not recognize the part that has been played by labour.

<sup>39</sup> i.e. evolutionists. While Marx and Engels both had respect for the theories of Charles Darwin (1809-82), they derided "social Darwinism" which attempted to apply Darwin's theories to developed societies.

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MARX, from "Remarks on the New Instructions to the Prussian Censors" (1842)

The law permits me to write; it asks only that I write in a style other than *my own*! I am allowed to show the face of my mind, but, first, I must give it a *prescribed expression*! Where is the man of honour who would not turn crimson at this imposition, who would not prefer to hide his head under his toga? At least, the toga hints that it may conceal the head of a Jupiter underneath.<sup>40</sup> Prescribed expressions mean only *bonne mine à mauvais jeu* [a favourable appearance to a bad game].

You admire nature's enchanting multiplicity, its inexhaustible richness. You do not demand that the rose smell like the violet; and yet, the mind, which is richest of all, is to be allowed to exist in but a *single* mode? I am inclined to humoristic writing, but the law bids me be serious. My style is bold; but the law orders moderation. The sole permissible colour of freedom is *gray on gray*. An inexhaustible play of colours glitters from each dewdrop on which the sun shines; and yet the mind's sun is to engender but one colour, the *official colour*, no matter how many individuals or which objects may be refracted! *Brightness* and *light* is the essential form of the mind, and you say that its only suitable manifestation is the *shadow* of it.

It is to be dressed only in black, although among flowers there is no black. The essence of mind is *always truth itself*: and what do you make of its essence? *Moderation*. Only a bedraggled beggar is modest, Goethe<sup>41</sup> said; a bedraggled beggar, is that what you want to make out of the mind? Or is moderation to be the moderation of genius, as Schiller says?<sup>42</sup> Then start by transforming each of your citizens, and your censors most of all, into geniuses. Indeed, the moderation of genius does not consist of the use of a cultivated language without accent or dialect; it lies rather in speaking the accent of the matter and the dialect of its essence. It lies in forgetting about moderation and immoderation and getting to the core of things. The underlying moderation of the mind lies in reason, that universal liberality which is related to *every nature* according to *its essential character*....

Are we to understand quite simply that *truth* is what *the government ordains*? Is the *investigation* of truth deemed superfluous and

<sup>40</sup> Jupiter, or Jove, was the supreme God of Roman mythology.

<sup>41</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), the greatest German poet, novelist and dramatist of his age, and one of the authors most frequently cited by Marx and Engels.

<sup>42</sup> Johann Christoph Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805), German poet, dramatist and critic.

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inappropriate, and yet, *because of etiquette*, as a third aspect that cannot quite be dismissed? Evidently so. For investigation is regarded categorically as *opposed* to truth; therefore, it appears with the suspiciously official patina of seriousness and moderation which a layman is supposed to display before a priest. Governmental rationale is the sole rationality in the state. Concessions will of course be made to other reasoning and idle talk under certain circumstances; but by the same token, they will in turn assume a consciousness of concession and have no real authority—being modest and subservient, serious and boring. It was Voltaire<sup>43</sup> who said: *tous les genres sont bons excepte le genre ennuyeux* [all styles are good except the tedious kind], and here the boring genre becomes the only one as we can see from *Die Verhandlungen der Rheinischen Landstände* [*The Proceedings of the Rhenish States*]. Why not rather use the good old German Holy Office style? Freely shall you write, but let every word be a genuflection toward the liberal censor who approves your modest, serious good judgment. Be sure that you do not lose a consciousness of humility!

#### **MARX, from “Debating the Freedom of the Press” (1842)**

At first it is startling to find *freedom of the press* subsumed under *freedom of doing business*. Yet, we must not condemn the views of the speaker out of hand. Rembrandt<sup>44</sup> painted the Mother of God as a Dutch Peasant woman, and why should not our speaker paint freedom in an image that is immediate and familiar to him?...

To defend or even understand the freedom of a domain, I must grasp its essential character rather than its extrinsic connections. But is a press true to its own character, does it behave in accord with the nobility of its nature, *is the press free*, when it demeans itself and becomes a *business*? A writer must of course earn a living to exist and be able to write, but he must in no sense exist and write so as to earn a living.

When Beranger<sup>45</sup> sings:

*Je ne vis, que pour faire des chansons,  
Si vous m'ôtez ma place, Monseigneur,  
Je ferai des chansons pour vivre,*

<sup>43</sup> François Marie Arouet de Voltaire (1694-1778). French Enlightenment author. The quotation is from the Preface to *L'Enfant Prodigue* (1738), where the original reads “hors” rather than “excepte”.

<sup>44</sup> Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn (1606-69). Dutch painter.

<sup>45</sup> Pierre-Jean de Beranger (1780-1857), popular French songwriter and poet.

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(I only live to make my songs,  
If you rob me of my place, Monseigneur,  
I will make songs in order to live,)

there is an ironic avowal in this threat: the poet falls from his domain, as soon as his poetry becomes but a means.

In no sense does the writer regard his works as a *means*. They are *ends in themselves*; so little are they means for him and others that, when necessary, he sacrifices *his* existence to *theirs*, and like the preacher of religion, though in another way, he takes as his principle: "God is to be obeyed before men". He himself with his human needs and desires is included among these men. Nonetheless, suppose that I have ordered a Parisian frock coat from a tailor, and he brings me a Roman toga because it is more in accord with the eternal law of Beauty! *The first freedom of the press consists in its not being a business*. The writer who debases it to a material means deserves as punishment of his intrinsic lack of freedom, the extrinsic lack of freedom, censorship; better yet, his existence is already his punishment.

### MARX, from *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*

We have seen what significance, given socialism, the *wealth* of human needs has, and what significance, therefore, both a *new mode of production* and a new *object* of production have: a new manifestation of the forces of *human* nature and a new enrichment of *human* nature. Under private property their significance is reversed: every person speculates on creating a *new* need in another so as to drive him to a fresh sacrifice, to place him in a new dependence and to seduce him into a new mode of *gratification* and therefore economic ruin. Each person tries to establish over the other an *alien* power, so as thereby to find satisfaction of his own selfish need. The increase in the quantity of objects is accompanied by an extension of the realm of the alien powers to which man is subjected, and every new product represents a new *potency* of mutual swindling and mutual plundering. Man becomes ever poorer as man; his need for *money* becomes ever greater if he wants to overpower hostile being; and the power of his *money* declines exactly in inverse proportion to the increase in the volume of production: that is, his neediness grows as the *power* of money increases.

The need for money is therefore the true need produced by the modern economic system, and it is the only need which the latter produces. The *quantity* of money becomes to an ever greater degree its sole *effective*

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attribute: just as it reduces everything to its abstract form, so it reduces itself in the course of its own movement to something merely *quantitative*. *Excess* and *intemperance* come to be its true norm. Subjectively, this is even partly manifested in that the extension of products and needs falls into *contriving* and *ever-calculating* subservience to inhuman, refined, unnatural and *imaginary* appetites. Private property does not know how to change crude need into *human* need. Its *idealism* is *fantasy*, *caprice* and *whim*; and no eunuch flatters his despot more basely or uses more despicable means to stimulate his dulled capacity for pleasure in order to sneak a favour for himself than does the industrial eunuch—the producer—in order to sneak for himself a few pennies—in order to charm the golden birds out of the pockets of his Christianly beloved neighbours. He puts himself at the service of the other's most depraved fancies, plays the pimp between him and his need, excites in him morbid appetites, lies in wait for each of his weaknesses—all so that he can then demand the cash for this service of love. (Every product is a bait with which to seduce away the other's very being, his money; every real and possible need is a weakness which will lead the fly to the gluepot. General exploitation of communal human nature, just as every imperfection in man, is a bond with heaven—an avenue giving the priest access to his heart; every need is an opportunity to approach one's neighbour under the guise of the utmost amiability and to say to him: Dear friend, I give you what you need, but you know the *conditio sine qua non* [condition without which there is nothing]; you know the ink in which you have to sign yourself over to me; in providing for your pleasure, I fleece you.)

And partly, this estrangement manifests itself in that it produces refinement of needs and of their means of satisfaction on the one hand, and a bestial barbarization, a complete, unrefined, abstract simplicity of need, on the other...

How the multiplication of needs and of their means of satisfaction breeds the absence of needs and of means is demonstrated by the political economist (and the capitalist: it should be noted that it is always *empirical* businessmen we are talking about when we refer to political economists—their *scientific* confession and mode of being)...

This science of marvellous industry is simultaneously the science of *asceticism*, and its true ideal is the *ascetic* but *extortionate* miser and the *ascetic* but *productive* slave. Its moral ideal is the *worker* who takes part of his wages to the savings-bank. And it has even found ready-made an abject *art* in which to clothe this its pet idea: they have presented it, bathed in sentimentality, on the stage. Thus political economy despite its worldly and wanton appearance—is a true moral science, the most moral of all the sciences. Self-denial, the denial of life and of all human needs, is its cardinal doctrine. The less you eat, drink and read books; the less you



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go to the theatre, the dance hall, the public-house; the less you think, love, theorize, sing, paint, fence, etc., the more you *save*—the *greater* becomes your treasure which neither moths nor dust will devour—your *capital*. The less you *are*, the more you *have*; the less you express your own life, the greater is your *alienated* life—the greater is the store of your estranged being. Everything which the political economist takes from you in life and in humanity, he replaces for you in *money* and in *wealth*; and all the things which you cannot do, your money can do. It can eat and drink, go to the dance hall and the theatre; it can travel, it can appropriate art, learning, the treasures of the past, political power—all this it *can* appropriate for you—it can buy all this for you: it is the true *endowment*. Yet being all this, it is *inclined* to do nothing but create itself, buy itself; for everything else is after all its servant. And when I have the master I have the servant and do not need his servant. All passions and all activity must therefore be submerged in avarice.

To be sure, the industrial capitalist also takes his pleasures. He does not by any means return to the unnatural simplicity of need; but his pleasure is only a side-issue—recuperation—something subordinated to production: at the same time it is a *calculated* and, therefore, itself an *economical* pleasure. For he debits it to his capital's expense-account, and what is squandered on his pleasure must therefore amount to no more than will be replaced with profit through the reproduction of capital.

### MARX, from *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations* (1858)

The ancient conception, in which man always appears (in however narrowly national, religious or political a definition) as the aim of production, seems much more exalted than the modern conception, in which production is the aim of man and wealth the aim of production. In fact, however, when the narrow bourgeois form has been peeled away, what is wealth if not the universality of needs, capacities, enjoyments, productive powers, etc., of individuals, produced in universal exchange? What, if not the full development of human control over the forces of nature—those of his own nature as well as those of so-called “nature”? What, if not the absolute elaboration of his creative dispositions, without any preconditions other than antecedent historical evolution which makes the totality of this evolution—i.e., the evolution of all human powers as such, unmeasured by any *previously established* yardstick—an end in itself? What, if not a situation where man does not reproduce himself in any determined form, but produces his totality, where he does not seek to remain something formed by the past, but is in the absolute movement of becoming? In bourgeois political economy—and in the epoch of

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production to which it corresponds—this complete elaboration of what lies within man appears as the total alienation, and the destruction of all fixed, one-sided purposes as the sacrifice of the end in itself to a wholly external compulsion. Hence in one way the childlike world of the ancients appears to be superior; and this is so, in so far as we seek for closed shape, form and established limitation. The ancients provide a narrow satisfaction, whereas the modern world leaves us unsatisfied, or, where it appears to be satisfied with itself, is *vulgar* and *mean*.

#### **MARX, from *Theories of Surplus Value* (1861-62)**

Because Storch<sup>46</sup> does not historically grasp material production itself—he sees it in general as the production of material goods, not as a definite, historically developed and specific form of this production—he loses the only footing that would allow him to grasp in part the ideological components of the ruling classes, in part the free<sup>47</sup> intellectual production of this given social formation. He cannot get beyond general and inept modes of expression. Thus, too, the relationship is not as simple as he assumes. For example, capitalist production is hostile to certain aspects of intellectual production, such as art and poetry. Looked at otherwise, the result would be like the conceit of the French in the eighteenth century, which Lessing so beautifully mocked. Since we have gone beyond the ancients in mechanics, etc., why shouldn't we also be able to bring forth an epic? In place of the *Iliad*, the *Henriad*!<sup>48</sup>

#### **ENGELS, from *Introduction to Dialectics of Nature* (1876)**

In the manuscripts saved from the fall of Byzantium,<sup>49</sup> in the antique statues dug out of the ruins of Rome, a new world was revealed to the astonished West, that of ancient Greece; the ghosts of the Middle Ages vanished before its shining forms; Italy rose to an undreamt-of flowering

<sup>46</sup> Heinrich Friedrich Storch (1766-1835), Russian economist, author of a study of political economy; polemicized against Adam Smith.

<sup>47</sup> The word may also be read as *fein* (subtle), according to the editor of the original manuscript.

<sup>48</sup> *La Henriade* (1723), an epic poem by Voltaire.

<sup>49</sup> Now Istanbul, Byzantium was an ancient Greek city founded in 658 BC, rebuilt and renamed "Constantinople" (after the Roman Emperor Constantine I) in 330 AD. After a millennium of considerable cultural and artistic development, the Byzantine Empire finally fell to the Ottomans when they captured Constantinople in 1453.

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of art, which seemed like a reflection of classical antiquity and was never attained again. In Italy, France and Germany a new literature arose, the first modern literature; shortly afterwards came the classical epochs of English and Spanish literature...

It was the greatest progressive revolution that mankind had so far experienced, a time which called for giants and produced giants—giants in power of thought, passion and character, in universality and learning. The men who founded the modern rule of the bourgeoisie had anything but bourgeois limitations. On the contrary, the adventurous character of the time imbued them to a greater or less degree. There was hardly any man of importance then living who had not travelled extensively, who did not command four or five languages, who did not shine in a number of fields. Leonardo da Vinci<sup>50</sup> was not only a great painter but also a great mathematician, mechanician and engineer, to whom the most diverse branches of physics are indebted for important discoveries; Albrecht Dürer<sup>51</sup> was painter, engraver, sculptor, architect, and in addition invented a system of fortification embodying many of the ideas that much later were again taken up by Montalembert<sup>52</sup> and the modern German science of fortification. Machiavelli was statesman, historian, poet, and at the same time the first notable military author of modern times.<sup>53</sup> Luther not only cleansed the Augean stable of the Church but also that of the German language;<sup>54</sup> he created modern German prose and composed the text and melody of that triumphal hymn which became the *Marseillaise*<sup>55</sup> of the sixteenth century. For the heroes of that time had not yet come under the servitude of the division of labour, the restricting effects of which, with their production of one-sidedness, we so often notice in their successors. But what is especially characteristic of them is that they almost all pursue their lives and activities in the midst of the contemporary movements, in the practical struggle; they take sides and join in the fight, one by speaking and writing, another with the sword, many with both. Hence the fullness and force of character that makes them complete men.

<sup>50</sup> Perhaps the most famous Renaissance artist of all (1452-1519).

<sup>51</sup> German artist (1471-1528).

<sup>52</sup> Charles René Forbes de Montalembert (1810-70), French historian and politician.

<sup>53</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527), Italian statesman and political philosopher.

<sup>54</sup> Martin Luther (1483-1546), German religious reformer and founder of the Reformation. The stables of Augeas housed the oxen of Augeas, a mythological king of Elis, and were never cleaned, until Hercules diverted a river through them. The term "to cleanse the Augean stables" thus means to wipe away corruption or disorder.

<sup>55</sup> The *Marseillaise* was the hymn of the French Revolution of 1789 and is still the French national anthem. Cf. Engels writing almost a decade later (see p. 103, below): "The *Marseillaise* of the Peasant War was: *Eine feste Burg ist unser Gott*".

# Communism and the Advent of Artistic Disalienation

MARX, from *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*

It will be seen how in place of the *wealth* and *poverty* of political economy come the *rich human being* and *rich human need*. The *rich human being* is simultaneously the human being *in need* of a totality of human life-activities—the man in whom his own realization exists as an inner necessity, as *need*. Not only *wealth*, but likewise the *poverty* of man—given socialism—receives in equal measure a *human* and therefore social significance. Poverty is the passive bond which causes the human being to experience the need of the greatest wealth—the *other human being*. The dominion of the objective being in me, the sensuous outburst of my essential activity, is *emotion*, which thus becomes here the *activity* of my being.

A *being* only considers himself independent when he stands on his own feet; and he only stands on his own feet when he owes his *existence* to himself. A man who lives by the grace of another regards himself as a dependent being. But I live completely by the grace of another if I owe him not only the sustenance of my life, but if he has, moreover, *created* my life—if he is the *source* of my life, and if it is not of my own creation, my life has necessarily a source of this kind outside it. The *Creation* is therefore an idea very difficult to dislodge from popular consciousness. The self-mediated being of nature and of man is *incomprehensible* to it, because it contradicts everything *palpable* in practical life...

The transcendence of private property is therefore the complete *emancipation* of all human senses and attributes; but it is this emancipation precisely because these senses and attributes have become, subjectively and objectively, *human*. The eye has become a *human eye*, just as its *object* has become a social, *human object*—an object emanating from man for man. The *senses* have therefore become directly in their practice *theoreticians*. They relate themselves to the *thing* for the sake of the thing, but the thing itself is an *objective human* relation to itself and to man,<sup>56</sup> and vice versa. Need or enjoyment have consequently lost their *egotistical* nature, and nature has lost its mere *utility* by use becoming *human use*...

This *material*, immediately *sensuous* private property, is the material sensuous expression of *estranged human* life. Its movement—production and consumption—is the *sensuous* revelation of the movement of all

<sup>56</sup> In practice I can relate myself to a thing humanly only if the thing relates itself to the human being humanly. [Note by Marx.]

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production hitherto—i.e., the realization or the reality of man. Religion, family, state, law, morality, science, art, etc., are only *particular* modes of production, and fall under its general law. The positive transcendence of *private property* as the appropriation of *human* life is, therefore, the positive transcendence of all estrangement—that is to say, the return of man from religion, family, state, etc., to his *human*, i.e., *social* mode of existence. Religious estrangement as such occurs only in the realm of *consciousness*, of man's inner life, but economic estrangement is that of *real life*: its transcendence therefore embraces both aspects...

*Communism* as the *positive* transcendence of *private property*, as *human self-estrangement*, and therefore, as the real *appropriation of the human* essence by and for man; communism, therefore, as the complete return of man to himself as a *social* (i.e., human) being—a return become conscious, and accomplished within the entire wealth of previous development. This communism, as fully developed naturalism, equals humanism, and as fully developed humanism equals naturalism; it is the *genuine* resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man—the true resolution of the strife between existence and essence, between objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity, between the individual and the species. Communism is the riddle of history solved, and it knows itself to be this solution...

When I am active *scientifically*, etc.,—when I am engaged in activity which I can seldom perform in direct community with others—then I am *social*, because I am active as a *man*. Not only is the material of my activity given to me as a social product (as is even the language in which the thinker is active): my *own* existence *is* social activity, and therefore, that which I make of myself, I make of myself for society and with the consciousness of myself as a social being.

My *general* consciousness is only the *theoretical* shape of that of which the *living* shape is the *real* community, the social fabric, although at the present day *general* consciousness is an abstraction from real life and as such antagonistically confronts it. Consequently, too, the *activity* of my general consciousness, as an activity, is my *theoretical* existence as a social being.

What is to be avoided above all is the re-establishing of "Society" as an abstraction *vis-à-vis* the individual. The individual is *the social being*. His life, even if it may not appear in the direct form of a *communal* life carried out together with others is, therefore, an expression and confirmation of *social life*. Man's individual and species life are not *different*, however much—and this is inevitable—the mode of existence of the individual is a more *particular*, or a more *general* mode of the life of the species, or the life of the species is a more *particular*, or a more *general* individual life.

In his *consciousness of species* man confirms his real *social life* and

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simply repeats his real existence in thought, just as conversely the being of the species confirms itself in species-consciousness and is for *itself* in its generality as a thinking being.

Man, much as he may therefore be a *particular* individual (and it is precisely his particularity which makes him an individual, and a real *individual* social being), is just as much the *totality*—the ideal totality—the subjective existence of thought and experienced society present for itself; just as he exists also in the real world as the awareness and the real enjoyment of social existence, and as a totality of human life-activity.

Thinking and being are thus no doubt *distinct*, but at the same time they are in *unity* with each other.

### **MARX and ENGELS, from *The German Ideology* (1845-46)**

The exclusive concentration of artistic talent in particular individuals, and its suppression in the broad mass which is bound up with this, is a consequence of division of labour. If, even in certain social conditions, everyone was an excellent painter, that would not at all exclude the possibility of each of them being also an original painter, so that here too the difference between “human” and “unique” labour amounts to sheer nonsense. In any case, with a communist organization of society, there disappears the subordination of the artist to local and national narrowness, which arises entirely from division of labour, and also the subordination of the artist to some definite art, thanks to which he is exclusively a painter, sculptor, etc., the very name of his activity adequately expressing the narrowness of his professional development and his dependence on division of labour. In a communist society there are no painters but at most people who engage in painting among other activities.

### **MARX and ENGELS, from *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848)**

All objections urged against the Communistic mode of producing and appropriating material products have, in the same way, been urged against the Communistic modes of producing and appropriating intellectual products. Just as, to the bourgeois, the disappearance of class property is the disappearance of production itself, so the disappearance of class culture is to him identical with the disappearance of all culture.

That culture, the loss of which he laments, is, for the enormous majority, a mere training to act as a machine.

But don't wrangle with us so long as you apply to our intended abolition of bourgeois property the standard of your bourgeois notions of

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freedom, culture, law, etc. Your very ideas are but the outgrowth of the conditions of your bourgeois production and bourgeois property...

Does it require deep intuition to comprehend that man's ideas, views and conceptions, in one word, man's consciousness, change with every change in the conditions of his material existence, in his social relations and his social life?

What else does the history of ideas prove than that intellectual production changes its character in proportion as material production is changed? The ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class....

In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.

### ENGELS, from *The Housing Question* (1872)

For Proudhon<sup>57</sup>...the whole industrial revolution of the last hundred years, the introduction of steam power and large-scale factory production which substitutes machinery for hand labour and increases the productivity of labour a thousandfold, is a highly repugnant occurrence, something which really ought never to have taken place. The petty-bourgeois Proudhon aspires to a world in which each person turns out a separate and independent product that is immediately consumable and exchangeable in the market. Then, as long as each person receives back the full value of his labour in the form of another product, "eternal justice" is satisfied and the best possible world created. But this best possible world of Proudhon has already been nipped in the bud and trodden underfoot by the advance of industrial development, which long ago destroyed individual labour in all the big branches of industry and which is destroying it daily more and more in the smaller and even smallest branches, which is setting social labour supported by machinery and the harnessed forces of nature in its place, and whose finished product, immediately exchangeable or consumable, is the joint work of the many individuals through whose hands it has had to pass. And it is precisely this industrial revolution which has raised the productive power of human labour to such a high level that—for the first time in the history of mankind—the possibility exists, given a rational division of labour among all, of producing not only enough for the plentiful consumption of all members of society and for an abundant

<sup>57</sup> Pierre Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865), French socialist whose ideas were taken over by the anarchist movement.

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reserve fund, but also of leaving each individual sufficient leisure so that what is really worth preserving in historically inherited culture—science, art, forms of intercourse—may not only be preserved but converted from a monopoly of the ruling class into the common property of the whole of society, and may be further developed. And here is the decisive point: as soon as the productive power of human labour has risen to this height, every excuse disappears for the existence of a ruling class. After all, the ultimate basis on which class differences were defended was always: there must be a class which need not plague itself with the production of its daily subsistence, in order that it may have time to look after the intellectual work of society. This talk, which up to now had its great historical justification, has been cut off at the root once and for all by the industrial revolution of the last hundred years. The existence of a ruling class is becoming daily more and more a hindrance to the development of industrial productive power, and equally so to that of science, art and especially forms of cultural intercourse. There never were greater boors than our modern bourgeois.



## Class Values in Literature

### MARX, from *The Holy Family* (1845)

The opposition between "good" and "evil" confronts the Critical Hercules<sup>58</sup> when he is still a youth in two personifications, *Murph* and *Polidori*, both of them Rudolph's teachers. The former educates him in good and is "good". The latter educates him in evil and is "evil". In order that this conception should by no means be inferior in triviality to similar conceptions in other novels, *Murph*, the personification of "good" cannot be "learned" or "particularly endowed intellectually". But he is *honest*, *simple*, and *laconic*; he feels himself great when he applies to evil such clipped words as "*foul*" or "*vile*", and has *horreur* for anything which is *base*. To use Hegel's expression, he sets the good and the true in equality of tones, i.e., in *one note*.<sup>59</sup>

*Polidori*, on the contrary, is a prodigy of cleverness, knowledge, and education, and at the same time of the "most dangerous immorality", having, in particular, what Eugène Sue, as a member of the young devout French bourgeoisie, could not forget—"the most frightful scepticism". We can judge of the moral energy and education of Eugène Sue and his hero by their panicky fear of *scepticism*.

"*Murph*," says Herr Szeliga, "is at the same time the perpetuated guilt of January 13 and the perpetual redemption of that guilt by his incomparable love and self-sacrifice for the person of Rudolph".

As Rudolph is the *deus ex machina* and the mediator of the world, *Murph* in turn is Rudolph's personal *deus ex machine* [god out of a machine]<sup>60</sup> and mediator.

"Rudolph and the salvation of mankind, Rudolph and the realization of the essential perfections of mankind are for *Murph* an inseparable unity, a unity to which he dedicates himself not with the stupid canine devotion of the slave, but knowingly and independently."

So *Murph* is an enlightened, knowing and independent slave. Like every prince's valet, he sees in his master the salvation of mankind personified. *Graun* flatters *Murph* with the words: "*fearless bodyguard*".

<sup>58</sup> A sarcastic nickname which Marx applies to a central character, Rudolph, in Eugène Sue's (1804-57) *Les Mystères de Paris* (1843). This novel is extensively discussed by Marx and Engels in *The Holy Family or Critique of Critical Criticism*, partly for its own class-conditioned limitations as social fiction, and partly as a basis to further criticize one of its approving critics, Franz Zychlinski (1816-1900), called Szeliga, who belonged to a Young Hegelian group of left intellectuals with whom Marx had earlier broken, owing to their moralistic preference for intellectual-elitist qualities, more or less typified in turn by the character Rudolph.

<sup>59</sup> George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), the great German idealist philosopher.

<sup>60</sup> i.e. an event contrived by dramatists to save a situation.

Rudolph himself calls him a *model servant*, and truly he is a *model servant*. Eugène Sue tells us that Murph scrupulously addresses Rudolph as "Monseigneur" when alone with him. In the presence of others he calls him "Monsieur" with his lips to keep his incognito, but "Monseigneur" with his heart.

"Murph helps to raise the veil from the mysteries, but only for Rudolph's sake. He helps to destroy the power of mystery."

The denseness of the veil with which Murph envelopes the simplest things of this world can be seen by his conversation with the envoy Graun. From the legal right of self-defence in case of emergency he concludes that Rudolph, as *judge of the secret court*, was entitled to blind the gang leader, although the latter was in chains and "defenceless". His description of how Rudolph will tell of his "noble" actions before the assizes, what eloquence and fine phrases he will display, and how he will let his great heart pour forth could have been written by a *Gymnasiast* [high school student] just after reading Schiller's *Robbers*...<sup>61</sup>

The gang leader is a criminal of herculean strength and great moral energy. He was brought up an educated and well-schooled man. This passionate athlete clashes with the laws and customs of bourgeois society whose universal yardstick is mediocrity, delicate morals and quiet trade. He becomes a murderer and abandons himself to all the excesses of a violent temperament that can nowhere find a fitting human occupation.

Rudolph captures this criminal. He wants to reform him critically and set him as an example for the *world of law*. He quarrels with the world of law not over "*punishment*" itself, but over *kinds* and *methods* of punishment... Rudolph has not the slightest idea that one can rise *above* criminal experts: his ambition is to be "*the greatest criminal expert*", *primus inter pares* [first among equals]. He has the gang leader *blinded* by the Negro doctor David...

The gang leader has abused his strength; Rudolph paralyzes, lames, destroys that strength. There is no more *Critical* means of getting rid of the incorrect manifestations of the essential force of man than to annihilate that essential force. This is the Christian means—plucking out the eye or cutting off the hand if it scandalizes; in a word, killing the body if the body scandalizes; for the eye, the hand, the body are really but superfluous sinful appendages of man. Human nature must be killed in order to heal its illnesses...

Eugène Sue satisfies his monkish, bestial lust in the *self-humiliation* of man to the extent of making the gang leader implore the old hag *Chouette* and the little imp *Tortillard* on his knees not to abandon him...

<sup>61</sup> Schiller, *Die Räuber* (1781).

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The idea of the punishment that Rudolph carried out in blinding the gang leader—the isolation of the man and his soul from the outer world, the association of legal penalty with theological torture—is decisively implemented in the *cell system*. That is why Monsieur Sue glorifies that system...

Eugène Sue's personages—earlier *Chourineur* and now the gang leader—must express, as the result of their *own* thoughts, the conscious motive of their acts, the reason why the writer makes them behave in a certain way and no other. They must continually say: I have amended in this, in that, etc. As they do not really come to a life of any content, what they say must give vigorous tones to insignificant features like the protection of *Fleur de Marie*.

### MARX and ENGELS, from *The German Ideology* (1845-46)

It depends not on *consciousness*, but on *being*; not on thought but on life; it depends on the empirical development and manifestation of life of the individual, which in turn depends on conditions in the world. If the circumstances in which the individual lives allow him only the [one]-sided development of a single quality at the expense of all the rest, if they give him the material and time to develop only that one quality, then this individual achieves only a one-sided, crippled development. No moral preaching avails here... In the case of an individual, for example, whose life embraces a wide circle of varied activities and practical relations to the world, and who, therefore, lives a many-sided life, thought has the same character of universality as every other manifestation of his life... The fact that under favourable circumstances some individuals are able to rid themselves of their local narrow-mindedness is not at all because the individuals by their reflection imagine that they have gotten rid of, or intended to get rid of, this local narrow-mindedness, but because they, in their empirical reality, and owing to empirical needs, have been able to bring about world intercourse.

### ENGELS, from "German Socialism in Verse and Prose, II" (1847)

Goethe stands in his works in a double relation to the German society of his time. Sometimes he is hostile to it: he tries to escape its odiousness, as in the *Iphigenia* [1771] and in general during the Italian journey; he rebels against it as Goetz, Prometheus, and Faust; he scorches it with his bitterest

scorn as Mephistopheles.<sup>62</sup> On the other hand, he is sometimes friendly to it, "accommodates" himself to it as in most of the *Tame Epigrams* and in many prose writings, celebrates it as in the *Masquerades*, even defends it against the intruding historical movement, particularly in all the writings where he happens to speak of the French Revolution. Goethe does not simply acknowledge particular sides of German life in opposition to others that are repugnant to him. Generally it depends on the various moods in which he finds himself; there is a continual struggle in himself between the poet of genius, who is disgusted by the wretchedness of his surroundings, and the Frankfurt alderman's cautious child, the privy councilor of Weimar, who sees himself obliged to make truce with it and to get used to it. Thus Goethe is sometimes colossal, sometimes petty; other times a defiant, ironical, world-scorning genius, or a considerate, complacent, narrow philistine. Even Goethe was unable to overcome the wretchedness of German life (*die deutsche Misere*); on the contrary, it overcame him, and this victory over the greatest German is the best proof that the wretchedness cannot be conquered by the individual "through intellectual means". Goethe was too universal, too active a nature, too physical to seek escape from this wretchedness in a flight as Schiller did in the Kantian ideal: he was too sharp-sighted not to see how this flight finally came down to an exchange of a commonplace for a highflown wretchedness. His temperament, his energies, his whole intellectual tendency directed him towards practical life, and the practical life that he encountered was miserable. This dilemma—to exist in a sphere of life that he had to despise, and at the same time, to be fettered to this sphere as the only one in which he could fulfil himself—was the one in which Goethe continually found himself, and, the older he became, the more retiring did the powerful poet become, *de guerre lasse* [weary of war], hiding behind the insignificant Weimar minister. We are not criticizing Goethe, à la Börne and Menzel,<sup>63</sup> for not being a liberal, but for being a philistine at times; we do not assert that he was incapable of any enthusiasm for German freedom, but that he sacrificed his sounder aesthetic feeling, which did occasionally break through, to a small-town aversion of every great contemporary historical movement. We do not accuse him of being a courtier, but of managing with a ceremonial seriousness the most trivial affairs and the *menus plaisirs* [minute details] of one of the most trivial

<sup>62</sup> Characters in Goethe's *Prometheus* (1774), *Goetz of Berlichingen with the Iron Hand* (1773), and *Faust* I and II (1808, 1832).

<sup>63</sup> Ludwig Börne (1786-1837), a spokesman of the "Young Germany" movement admired by a younger Engels who had wanted to pursue a literary career in its image; and Wolfgang Menzel (1798-1873), major critic of the day, who attacked the "Young Germany" movement, and Goethe as well.

little German courts at a time when a Napoleon was cleaning out the vast Augean stables of Germany.<sup>64</sup> In general, we are reproaching him neither from moral nor from partisan standpoints, but chiefly from aesthetic and historical standpoints; we are measuring Goethe neither by a moral, nor by a political, nor by a "humane" standpoint.

ENGELS, from "The Manifesto of M. de Lamartine" (1847)<sup>65</sup>

You recently published this curious piece of workmanship. It consists of two very distinct parts: *political* measures and *social* measures. Now the political measures are, one and all, taken from the constitution of 1791, with almost no alteration; that is, they are the return to the demands of the middle classes in the beginning of the revolution. At that time the whole of the middle classes, including even the smaller tradesman, were invested with political power, while at present the participation in it is restrained to the large capitalists. What, then, is the meaning of the political measures proposed by M. de Lamartine? To give the government into the hands of the inferior *bourgeoisie*, but under the semblance of giving it to the whole people (this, and nothing else, is the meaning of his universal suffrage, with his double system of elections). And his *social* measures? Why they are either things which presuppose that a successful revolution has already given the political power to the people—such as gratuitous education for all; or measures of pure charity, that is measures to soften down the revolutionary energies of the proletarians; or mere high-sounding words without any practical meaning, such as extinction of mendicity by order in council, abolition of public distress by law, a ministry of the people's life, etc. They are, therefore, either totally useless to the people, or calculated to benefit them in such a degree only as will assure some sort of public tranquillity, or they are mere empty promises, which no man can keep—and in these two last cases they are worse than useless. In short, M. de Lamartine proves himself, both under a social and a political point of view, the faithful representative of the small tradesman, the inferior bourgeoisie, and who shares in the illusion particular to this class: that he represents the working people.

<sup>64</sup> Half of Prussia was lost following its defeat at the hands of Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821) at the battles of Jena and Auerstadt in 1806.

<sup>65</sup> Alphonse Marie Louis de Lamartine (1790-1869), French Romantic poet, historian, and bourgeois politician, became the head of the provisional Republican government of February 1848. Engels' letter is to *The Northern Star*, the English Chartist newspaper, which had printed extracts from Lamartine's manifesto on French political problems. The next three selections also centre on Lamartine.

**MARX, from "The Revolutionary Movement" (1849)<sup>66</sup>**

Never was a revolutionary movement begun with such a spiritually uplifting overture as the revolutionary movement of 1848. The Pope offered the Church's blessing; Lamartine's Aeolian harp trembled to gentle-sounding philanthropical melodies whose text was *fraternité*, the fraternization of society's parts and the nations.

*Seid umschlungen Millionen,  
diesen Kuss der Ganzen Welt!*<sup>67</sup>

[Millions, be you embraced!  
For the Universe, this kiss!]

**MARX, from *The Class Struggles in France 1848-1850* (1850)**

Lamartine in the Provisional Government, this was at first no real interest, no definite class; this was the February Revolution itself, the common uprising with its illusions, its poetry, its visionary content and its phrases. For the rest, the spokesman of the February Revolution, by his position and his views, belonged to the *bourgeoisie*.<sup>68</sup>

If Paris, as a result of political centralization, rules France, then the workers, in moments of revolutionary earthquakes, rule Paris. The first act in the life of the Provisional Government was an attempt to escape from this overpowering influence by an appeal from intoxicated Paris to sober France. Lamartine disputed the right of the barricade fighters to proclaim a republic on the ground that only the majority of Frenchmen had that right; they must await their votes; the Paris proletariat must not besmirch its victory by a usurpation. The bourgeoisie allows the proletariat only one usurpation—that of fighting...

At that time all the royalists were transformed into republicans and all the millionaires of Paris into workers. The phrase which corresponded to this imaginary abolition of class relations was *fraternité*, universal fraternization and brotherhood. This pleasant abstraction from class

<sup>66</sup> This article on "The Revolutionary Movement" appeared in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, edited by Marx; it was the chief organ of the proletarian wing in the fight for German democracy.

<sup>67</sup> From Schiller, "Hymn to Joy". Used by Beethoven in the last movement of his Ninth Symphony.

<sup>68</sup> Marx refers to the events of 23 February 1848 in Paris, when King Louis Philippe was deposed and Lamartine took the helm of the Provisional Government.

antagonisms, this sentimental reconciliation of contradictory class interests, this visionary elevation above the class struggle, this *fraternité* was the real catchword of the February Revolution. The classes were divided by a mere *misunderstanding* and Lamartine baptized the Provisional Government on February 24 "*un gouvernement qui suspende ce malentendu terrible qui existe entre les différentes classes*" [a government which suspends the terrible misunderstanding which exists between different classes]. The Paris proletariat revelled in this magnanimous intoxication of fraternity....

The official representatives of French democracy were steeped in republican ideology to such an extent that it was only some weeks later that they began to have an inkling of the significance of the June fight. They were stupefied by the gunpowder smoke in which their fantastic republic dissolved. The reader will allow us to describe our immediate impression of the June defeat in the words of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*:

"The last official remnant of the February Revolution, the Executive Commission, has melted away, like an apparition, before the seriousness of events. The fireworks of Lamartine have turned into the war rockets of Cavaignac.<sup>69</sup> *Fraternité*, the fraternity of antagonistic classes, of which one exploits the other, this *fraternité*, proclaimed in February, written in capital letters on the brow of Paris, on every prison, on every barracks—its true, unadulterated, prosaic expression is *civil war*, civil war in its most frightful form, the war of labour and capital. This fraternity flamed in front of all the windows of Paris on the evening of June 25, when the Paris of the bourgeoisie was illuminated, while the Paris of the proletariat burnt, bled, moaned unto death. Fraternity endured just as long as the interests of the bourgeoisie were in fraternity with the interests of the proletariat.

"Pedants of the old revolutionary traditions of 1793; socialist systematizers who begged at the doors of the bourgeoisie on behalf of the people and were allowed to preach long sermons and to compromise themselves as long as the proletarian lion had to be lulled to sleep; republicans who demanded the old bourgeois order in its entirety, with the exception of the crowned head; adherents of the dynasty among the opposition upon whom accident foisted the overthrow of the dynasty instead of a change of ministers; Legitimists who did not want to cast aside the livery but to change its cut—these were the allies with whom the people made its February.—The February Revolution was the *beautiful*

<sup>69</sup> Louis Eugène Cavaignac (1802-57). French soldier, became Governor General of Algeria in 1848, but was recalled and became Minister of War, and quelled the June insurrection.

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revolution, the revolution of universal sympathy, because the antagonisms which had flared up in it against the monarchy slumbered *undeveloped*, harmoniously side by side, because the social struggle which formed its background had won only an airy existence, an existence of phrases, of words. The *June Revolution* is the *ugly* revolution, the repulsive revolution, because deeds have taken the place of phrases..."

**MARX, from *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852)**

Thus arose the Social-Democracy. The new *Montagne*, the result of this combination, contained, apart from some supernumeraries from the working class and some socialist sectarians, the same elements as the old *Montagne*, only numerically stronger. However, in the course of development, it had changed with the class that it represented. The peculiar character of the Social-Democracy is epitomized in the fact that democratic-republican institutions are demanded as a means, not of doing away with two extremes, capital and wage labour, but of weakening their antagonism and transforming it into harmony. However different the means proposed for the attainment of this end may be, however much it may be trimmed with more or less revolutionary notions, the content remains the same. This content is the transformation of society in a democratic way, but a transformation within the bounds of the petty bourgeoisie. Only one must not form the narrow-minded notion that the petty bourgeoisie, on principle, wishes to enforce an egoistic class interest. Rather, it believes that the *special* conditions of its emancipation are the *general* conditions within the frame of which alone modern society can be saved and the class struggle avoided. Just as little must one imagine that the democratic representatives are indeed all shopkeepers or enthusiastic champions of shopkeepers. According to their education and their individual position they may be as far apart as heaven from earth. What makes them representatives of the petty bourgeoisie is the fact that in their minds they do not get beyond the limits which the latter do not get beyond in life, that they are consequently driven, theoretically, to the same problems and solutions to which material interest and social position drive the latter practically. This is, in general, the relationship between the *political* and *literary representatives* of a class and the class they represent.



**MARX, from *Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859)**

In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite state of the development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come in conflict with the existing relations of production, or—what is but a legal expression for the same thing—with the property relations within which they have been at work hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolution. With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed. In considering such transformations a distinction should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic—in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. Just as our opinion of an individual is not based on what he thinks of himself, so can we not judge of such a period of transformation by its own consciousness; on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained rather from the contradictions of material life, from the existing conflict between the social productive forces and the relations of production.

**ENGELS, from *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* (1886)**

Just as in France in the eighteenth century, so in Germany in the nineteenth, a philosophical revolution ushered in the political collapse. But how different the two looked! The French were in open combat against all official science, against the church and often also against the state; their writings were printed across the frontier, in Holland or

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England, while they themselves were often in jeopardy of imprisonment in the Bastille.<sup>70</sup> On the other hand, the Germans were professors, state-appointed instructors of youth; their writings were recognized textbooks, and the terminating system of the whole development—the Hegelian system—was even raised, as it were, to the rank of a royal Prussian philosophy of state! Was it possible that a revolution could hide behind these professors, behind their obscure, pedantic phrases, their ponderous, wearisome sentences? Were not precisely those people who were then regarded as the representatives of the revolution, the liberals, the bitterest opponents of this brain-confusing philosophy? But what neither the government nor the liberals saw was seen at least by one man as early as 1833, and this man was none other than Heinrich Heine.<sup>71</sup>

#### **ENGELS, from Letter to Paul Ernst, June 5, 1890**

Unfortunately I cannot comply with your request to write you a letter that you could use against Herr Bahr.<sup>72</sup> This would involve me in an open polemic against him, and for that I would literally have to rob myself of the time. What I write here, therefore, is intended only for you personally.

Furthermore, I am not at all acquainted with what you call the feminist movement in Scandinavia; I only know some of Ibsen's dramas and have not the slightest idea whether or to what extent Ibsen can be considered responsible for the more or less hysterical effusions of bourgeois and petty bourgeois women careerists.<sup>73</sup>

On the other hand, the field covered by what is generally designated as the woman question is so vast that one cannot, within the confines of a

<sup>70</sup> The infamous Paris prison.

<sup>71</sup> Heinrich Heine (1797-1856), the most important pre-1848 German political poet; widely considered to rank among the great nineteenth century authors. The reference is to his *French Affairs*, a collection of newspaper articles published between 1830 and 1832.

<sup>72</sup> Hermann Bahr (1863-1934), the Austrian drama critic. Paul Ernst (1866-1933) was an editor of the German Social-Democrat Party journal of theory, *Die Neue Zeit*, in which he regularly wrote on literature and drama. He had recently debated the Scandinavian women's movement and its literary treatment with a writer from the *Freie Bühne für modernes Leben*, a magazine of German naturalism, on which Bahr was an editor. Ernst held that women's liberation could only result with the general, inevitable development of productive relations; he ridiculed as "petty bourgeois" Ibsen and others who saw a moral and psychological issue. Bahr then jumped into the fray by attacking Ernst in a pair of articles. "The Epigones of Marxism", which defended what Bahr saw as the authentic Marxian view; and Ernst then requested this assistance from Engels. By 1890, Ernst was involved with the "youth" faction of the party, about which Engels writes in the last document of this section. In 1891 Ernst was expelled from the Social-Democratic Party.

<sup>73</sup> Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906), Norwegian playwright.

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letter, treat this subject thoroughly or say anything half-way satisfactory about it. This much is certain, that Marx could never have "adopted the attitude" ascribed to him by Herr Bahr; after all, he was not crazy.

As for your attempt to explain this matter from the materialist viewpoint, I must tell you from the very first that the materialist method is converted into its direct opposite if, instead of being used as a guiding thread in historical research, it is made to serve as a ready-cut pattern on which to tailor historical facts. And if Herr Bahr thinks he has caught you in a mistake, it seems to me that he is somewhat justified.

You classify all Norway, and everything happening there, as petty bourgeois, and then, without the slightest hesitation, you apply to this Norwegian petty bourgeoisie your ideas about the German petty bourgeoisie.

Now two facts stand in the way here.

In the first place: at a time when throughout all Europe the victory over Napoleon spelled a victory of reaction over revolution, when only in its homeland, France, was the revolution still capable of inspiring enough fear to wrest from the re-established Bourbons<sup>74</sup> a bourgeois liberal constitution, Norway was able to secure a constitution far more democratic than any constitution in Europe at that time.<sup>75</sup>

In the second place, during the course of the last twenty years Norway has had a literary renaissance unlike that of any other country of this period, except Russia. Petty bourgeois or not, these people are creating more than anywhere else, and stamping their imprint upon literature of other countries, including Germany.

These facts demand, in my opinion, that we analyze the specific characteristics of the Norwegian petty bourgeoisie.

You will no doubt then perceive that we are here faced with a very important difference. In Germany the petty bourgeoisie is the product of an abortive revolution, of an arrested, thwarted development; it owes its peculiar and very marked characteristics of cowardice, narrowness, impotence and ineffectuality to the Thirty Years War and the ensuing period during which almost all of the other great nations were, on the contrary, developing rapidly. These traits remained with the German petty bourgeoisie even after Germany had again been carried into the stream of historical development; they were pronounced enough to engrave themselves upon all the other German social classes as more or less typically German, until the day when our working class broke through

<sup>74</sup> "Bourbon" was the family name of the kings of France from 1589 to 1793 and from 1815 to 1830.

<sup>75</sup> The nobility was abolished in Norway in 1821.

these narrow boundaries. The German workers are with justification all the more violently "without a country" in that they are entirely free of German petty bourgeois narrowness. Thus the German petty bourgeoisie does not constitute a normal historical phase, but an extremely exaggerated caricature, a phenomenon of degeneration. The petty bourgeoisie of England, France, etc., are on an altogether different level than the German petty bourgeoisie.

In Norway, on the other hand, the small peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie, together with a limited section of the middle class—just as in England and France in the seventeenth century, for example—have for several centuries represented the normal state of society. Here there can be no question of a violent return to outdated conditions as a consequence of some great defeated movement or a Thirty Years War.<sup>76</sup> The country has lagged behind the times because of its isolation and natural conditions, but its situation has always corresponded to its conditions of production, and, therefore, been normal. Only very recently have manifestations of large scale industry sporadically made their appearance in the country, but that mighty lever of the concentration of capital, the Bourse,<sup>77</sup> is lacking. Furthermore the powerful shipping industry also exerts a conservative influence, for while throughout the rest of the world steamboats are superseding sailing vessels, Norway is expanding her sailing vessel navigation considerably, and possesses if not the greatest then at all events the second greatest fleet of sailing ships in the world, belonging mostly to small shipowners, just as in England around 1720. Nevertheless, this circumstance has infused new vitality into the old lethargic existence, and this vitality has made itself felt also in the literary revival.

The Norwegian peasant has never known serfdom, and this fact gives an altogether different background to the whole development of the country, as it did in Castile.<sup>78</sup> The Norwegian petty bourgeois is the son of a free peasant, and for this reason he is a *man* compared to the miserable German philistine. Likewise the Norwegian petty bourgeois woman is infinitely superior to the wife of a German philistine. And whatever the weaknesses of Ibsen's dramas, for instance, they undoubtedly reflect the world of the petty and the middle bourgeoisie, but a world totally different from the German world, a world where men are still possessed of character and initiative and the capacity for independent action, even though their behaviour may seem odd to a foreign observer.

<sup>76</sup> The post-reformation conflicts in Germany between 1618 and 1648.

<sup>77</sup> I.e. a stock exchange (known in Paris as "the Bourse").

<sup>78</sup> The region which makes up most of modern Spain.

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### ENGELS, from Letter to Paul Lafargue,<sup>79</sup> August 27, 1890

There has been a students' revolt in the German Party. For the past 2-3 years, a crowd of students, literary men and other young declassed bourgeois has rushed into the Party, arriving just in time to occupy most of the editorial positions on the new journals which are sprouting and, as usual, they regard the bourgeois universities as a Socialist Staff College which gives them the right to enter the ranks of the party with an officer's if not a general's brevet. All these gentlemen go in for Marxism, but of the kind you were familiar with in France ten years ago and of which Marx said: "All I know is that I'm no Marxist!" And of these gentlemen he would probably have said what Heine said of his imitators: I sowed dragons and reaped fleas.

These worthy fellows, whose impotence is only matched by their arrogance, have found some support in the new recruits to the Party in Berlin—typical Berlinism, which is to be interpreted as presumption, cowardice, empty bluster and gift of the gab all rolled into one, seems to have come to the surface again for a moment; it provided the chorus for the student gentry.

### ENGELS, from Letter to Conrad Schmidt,<sup>80</sup> October 27, 1890

As to the realms of ideology which soar still higher in the air—religion, philosophy, etc.—these have a prehistoric stock, found already in existence by and taken over in the historic period of what we should today call bunk. These various false conceptions of nature, of man's own being, of spirits, magic forces, etc., have for the most part only a negative economic basis; the low economic development of the prehistoric period is supplemented and also partially conditioned and even caused by the false conceptions of nature. And even though economic necessity was the main driving force of the progressive knowledge of nature and becomes ever more so, it would surely be pedantic to try and find economic causes for all this primitive nonsense. The history of science is the history of the gradual clearing away of this nonsense or of its replacement by fresh but always less absurd nonsense. The people who attend to this belong in their turn to special spheres in the division of labour and appear to themselves to be working in an independent field. And to the extent that they form an

<sup>79</sup> Paul Lafargue (1841-1911) was Marx's son-in-law, being the husband of his daughter Laura.

<sup>80</sup> Conrad Schmidt (1863-1932), German economist and philosopher, at first an adherent of Marxism, later an opponent of it.

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independent group within the social division of labour, their productions, including their errors, react back as an influence upon the whole development of society, even on its economic development. But all the same they themselves are again under the dominating influence of economic development. In philosophy, for instance, this can be most readily proved for the bourgeois period. Hobbes was the first modern materialist (in the eighteenth-century sense) but he was an absolutist in a period when absolute monarchy was at its height throughout the whole of Europe and when the fight of absolute monarchy versus the people was beginning in England.<sup>81</sup> Locke, both in religion and politics, was the child of the class compromise of 1688.<sup>82</sup> The English deists and their more consistent continuators, the French materialists, were the true philosophers of the bourgeoisie, the French even of the bourgeois revolution. The German Philistine runs through German philosophy from Kant<sup>83</sup> to Hegel, sometimes positively and sometimes negatively. But the philosophy of every epoch, since it is a definite sphere in the division of labour, has as its presupposition certain definite thought material handed down to it by its predecessors, from which it takes its start. And that is why economically backward countries can still play first fiddle in philosophy: France in the eighteenth century compared with England, on whose philosophy the French based themselves, and later Germany relatively to both. But in France as well as in Germany, philosophy and the general blossoming of literature at that time were the result of a rising economic development. I consider the ultimate supremacy of economic development established in these spheres too, but it comes to pass within the conditions imposed by the particular sphere itself: in philosophy, for instance, through the operation of economic influences (which again generally act only under political, etc., disguises) upon the existing philosophic material handed down by predecessors. Here economy creates nothing anew, but it determines the way in which the thought material found in existence is altered and further developed, and that too for the most part indirectly, for it is the political, legal and moral reflexes which exercise the greatest direct influence upon philosophy.

<sup>81</sup> Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), English political philosopher, best known for his defence of monarchical absolutism, *Leviathan* (1651).

<sup>82</sup> John Locke (1632-1704), English empirical philosopher, influential on later theorists of liberal democracy.

<sup>83</sup> Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), major German philosopher.

ENGELS, from "Preface" to the Fourth Edition, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (June 16, 1891)

Bachofen<sup>84</sup> points to the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus as a dramatic depiction of the struggle between the declining mother right and the rising, victorious father right in the Heroic Age. Clytemnestra has slain her husband Agamemnon, who has just returned from the Trojan War, for the sake of her lover Aegisthus; but Orestes, her son by Agamemnon, avenges his father's murder by slaying his mother. For this he is pursued by the Erinyes, the demonic defenders of mother right, according to which matricide is the most heinous and inexpiable of crimes. But Apollo, who through his oracle has incited Orestes to commit this deed, and Athena, who is called in as arbiter—the two deities which here represent the new order, based on father right—protect him. Athena hears both sides. The whole controversy is briefly summarized in the debate which now ensues between Orestes and the Erinyes. Orestes declares that Clytemnestra is guilty of a double outrage; for in killing *her* husband, she also killed *his* father. Why then have the Erinyes persecuted him and not Clytemnestra, who is much the greater culprit? The reply is striking:

"*Unrelated by blood was she to the man that she slew.*" The murder of a man not related by blood, even though he be the husband of the murderess, is expiable and does not concern the Erinyes. Their function is to avenge only murders among blood-relatives, and the most heinous of all these, according to mother right, is matricide. Apollo now intervenes in defence of Orestes. Athena calls upon the Areopagites—the Athenian jurors—to vote on the question. The votes for acquittal and for the conviction are equal. Then Athena, as President of the Court, casts her vote in favour of Orestes and acquits him. Father right has gained the day over mother right. The "gods of junior lineage", as they are described by the Erinyes themselves, are victorious over the Erinyes, and the latter allow themselves finally to be persuaded to assume a new office in the service of the new order.

This new but absolutely correct interpretation of the *Oresteia* is one of the best and most beautiful passages in the whole book, but it shows at the same time that Bachofen himself believes in the Erinyes, Apollo, and Athena at least as much as Aeschylus did in his day; in fact, he believes that in the Heroic Age of Greece they performed the miracle of overthrowing mother right and replacing it by father right. Clearly, such a conception—which regards religion as the decisive lever in world

<sup>84</sup> Johann Jakob Bachofen (1815-1887), Swiss historian, sociologist and jurist, the author of *Mother Right* (1861).

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history—must finally end in sheer mysticism. Therefore, it is an arduous and by no means always profitable task to wade through Bachofen's bulky quarto volume. But all this does not detract from his merit as a pioneer, for he was the first to substitute for mere phrases about an unknown primitive condition of promiscuous sexual intercourse concrete proof that ancient classical literature teems with traces of a condition that had in fact existed before monogamy among the Greeks and the Asiatics, in which not only a man had sexual intercourse with more than one woman, but a woman had sexual intercourse with more than one man, without violating the established custom; that this custom did not disappear without leaving traces in the form of the limited surrender by which women were compelled to purchase their right to monogamous marriage; that descent, therefore, could originally be reckoned only in the female line, from mother to mother; that this exclusive validity of the female line persisted far into the time of monogamy with assured, or at least recognized, paternity; and that this original position of the mother as the sole certain parent of her children assured her, and thus women in general, a higher social status than they have ever enjoyed since. Bachofen did not express these propositions as clearly as this—his mystical outlook prevented him from doing so; but he proved that they were correct, and this, in 1861, meant a complete revolution.

**ENGELS, from "Preface" to the Italian edition of *The Communist Manifesto* (February 1, 1892)**

The close of the feudal Middle Ages and the onset of the modern capitalistic era are marked by a figure of grandiose stature: it is an Italian, Dante, who is both the last poet of the Middle Ages and the first modern poet.<sup>85</sup> Today, just as it was around 1300, a new historical era is in the making. Will Italy provide us with a new Dante who will announce the birth of this new proletarian era?

<sup>85</sup> Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), Florentine poet.



# The Class Reception of Artistic Values

MARX, from *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852)

Hegel remarks somewhere that all facts and personages of great importance in world history occur, as it were, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce...

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they seem engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things, in creating something that has never yet existed, precisely in such periods of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle cries and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honoured disguise and this borrowed language. Thus Luther donned the mask of the Apostle Paul, the Revolution of 1789 to 1814 draped itself alternately as the Roman Republic and the Roman empire, and the Revolution of 1848 knew nothing better to do than to parody, now 1789, now the revolutionary tradition of 1793 to 1795. In like manner a beginner who has learnt a new language always translates it back into his mother tongue, but he has assimilated the spirit of the new language and can freely express himself in it only when he finds his way in it without recalling the old and forgets his native tongue in the use of the new...

But unheroic as bourgeois society is, it nevertheless took heroism, sacrifice, terror, civil war and battles of peoples to bring it into being. And in the classically austere traditions of the Roman republic its gladiators found the ideals and the art forms, the self-deceptions that they needed in order to conceal from themselves the bourgeois limitations of the content of their struggles and to keep their enthusiasm on the high plane of the great historical tragedy. Similarly, at another stage of development, a century earlier, Cromwell and the English people had borrowed speech, passions and illusions from the Old Testament for their bourgeois revolution.<sup>86</sup> When the real aim had been achieved, when the bourgeois transformation of English society had been accomplished, Locke supplanted Habakkuk.<sup>87</sup>

Thus the awakening of the dead in those revolutions served the purpose of glorifying the new struggles, not of parodying the old; of magnifying the given task in imagination, not of fleeing from its solution in reality; of

<sup>86</sup> Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658), English soldier and politician, lord protector of England between 1653 and 1658, following his key rôle in the English Civil War.

<sup>87</sup> i.e. political theory superseded theology (the reference is to the book of the Old Testament bearing the name of a prophet noted for his passionate indignation against social oppressors).

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finding once more the spirit of revolution, not of making its ghost walk again...

The social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself before it has stripped off all superstition in regard to the past. Earlier revolutions required recollections of past world history in order to drug themselves concerning their own content. In order to arrive at its own content, the revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury their dead. There the phrase went beyond the content; here the content goes beyond the phrase.

**MARX, from Letter to Ferdinand Lassalle, July 22, 1861**

You have demonstrated that originally (and even today, if we consider the scientific insight of the juridical experts) the adoption of the Roman Testament [as a modern rule for inheritance law] rests on a misunderstanding. But it in no way follows that in its *modern* form the Testament—through whatever misunderstandings of Roman law the contemporary juridical experts may be able to reconstrue it—is the *misunderstood* Roman Testament. Otherwise it might be said that every achievement of an older period, which is adopted in later times, is part of the *old misunderstood*. For example, the three unities as the French dramatists under Louis XIV<sup>88</sup> theoretically construe them, most surely rest on a misunderstanding of the Greek drama (and of Aristotle, its exponent). On the other hand, it is equally certain that they understood the Greeks in just such a way as suited their own artistic needs which is why they still clung to this so-called “classical” drama long after Dacier<sup>89</sup> and others had correctly interpreted Aristotle for them. Thus, too, all modern constitutions rest in great part on the *misunderstood* English constitution, for they take as essential precisely that which constitutes the decadence of the English constitution—which now exists only *formally, per abusum* [by means of abuse], in England—eg., a so-called responsible *Cabinet*. The misunderstood form is precisely the general form, applicable for general use at a definite stage of social development.

<sup>88</sup> The king of France between 1643 and 1715. The Aristotelian theory of dramatic unity is to be found in his *Poetics*, and pertains only to the action of the drama; but after the rediscovery of this text in the late sixteenth century it became associated with the three “prescriptive” unities of action, time and place. The adoption of these unities was common in much French Renaissance drama, especially that of Jean Racine (1639-99).

<sup>89</sup> André Dacier (1651-1722), French philologist, translator of Aristotle’s *Poetics* (1692).

## The Class Reception of Artistic Values

### ENGELS, from Letter to Franz Mehring, July 14, 1893

Today is my first opportunity to thank you for the *Lessing Legend* you were kind enough to send me.<sup>90</sup> I did not want to reply with a bare formal acknowledgement of receipt of the book but intended at the same time to tell you something about it, about its contents. Hence the delay.

I shall begin at the end—the appendix on historical materialism, in which you have lined up the main things excellently and for any unprejudiced person convincingly. If I find anything to object to, it is that you give me more credit than I deserve, even if I count in everything which I might possibly have found out for myself—in time—but which Marx with his more rapid *coup d'oeil* [general view] and wider vision discovered much more quickly. When one has the good fortune to work for forty years with a man like Marx, one does not usually get the recognition one thinks one deserves during his lifetime. Then, if the greater man dies, the lesser easily gets overrated, and this seems to me to be just my case at present; history will set all this right in the end and by that time one will have quietly turned up one's toes and not know anything any more about anything.

Otherwise, there is only one point lacking, which, however, Marx and I always failed to stress enough in our writings and in regard to which we are all equally guilty. That is to say, we all laid, and *were bound* to lay, the main emphasis, in the first place, on the *derivation* of political, juridical and other ideological notions, and of actions arising through the medium of these notions, from basic economic facts. But in so doing we neglected the formal side—the ways and means by which these notions, etc., come about—for the sake of the content. This has given our adversaries a welcome opportunity for misunderstandings and distortions, of which Paul Barth<sup>91</sup> is a striking example.

Ideology is a process accomplished by the so-called thinker consciously, it is true, but with a false consciousness. The real motive forces impelling him remain unknown to him: otherwise it simply would not be an ideological process. Hence, he imagines false or seeming motive forces. Because it is a process of thought he derives its form as well as its content from pure thought, either his own or that of his predecessors. He works with mere thought material, which he accepts without examination as the product of thought, and does not investigate further for a more

<sup>90</sup> Franz Mehring (1846-1919), the major literary critic in the German Social-Democratic Party until his death, published in 1893 his study of the class-conditioned scholarship on Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-81). German writer, once a student at Leipzig.

<sup>91</sup> Paul Barth (1858-1922). German philosopher and sociologist, Professor at the University of Leipzig.

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remote source independent of thought; indeed, this is a matter of course to him because, as all action is *mediated* by thought, it appears to him to be ultimately *based* upon thought.

The ideologist who deals with history (history is here simply meant to comprise all the spheres—political, juridical, philosophical, theological—belonging to *society* and not only to nature) thus possesses in every sphere of science material which has formed itself independently out of the thought of previous generations and has gone through its own independent process of development in the brains of these successive generations. True, external facts belonging to one or another sphere may have exercised a codetermining influence on this development, but the tacit presupposition is that these facts themselves are also only the fruits of a process of thought, and so we still remain within that realm of mere thought, which apparently has successfully digested even the hardest facts.

It is above all this appearance of an independent history of state constitutions, of systems of law, of ideological conceptions in every separate domain that dazzles most people. If Luther and Calvin<sup>92</sup> “overcome” the official Catholic religion or Hegel “overcomes” Fichte<sup>93</sup> and Kant or Rousseau with his republican *contrat social* indirectly overcomes the constitutional Montesquieu,<sup>94</sup> this is a process which remains within theology, philosophy or political science, represents a stage in the history of these particular spheres of thought and never passes beyond the sphere of thought. And since the bourgeois illusion of the eternity and finality of capitalist production has been added as well, even the overcoming of the mercantilists by the physiocrats and Adam Smith<sup>95</sup> is accounted as a sheer victory of thought; not as the reflection in thought of changed economic facts but as the finally achieved correct understanding of actual conditions subsisting always and everywhere—in fact, if Richard Coeur de Lion and Philip Augustus<sup>96</sup> had introduced free trade instead of getting mixed up in the crusades we should have been spared five hundred years of misery and stupidity.

It is this aspect of the matter, which I can only indicate here, that we have all, I think, neglected more than it deserves. It is the same old story: form is always neglected at first for content. As I say, I have done that, too, and the mistake has always struck me only later. So I am not only far

<sup>92</sup> John Calvin (1509-64), French theologian and reformer, a key figure in the Reformation.

<sup>93</sup> Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814), German philosopher.

<sup>94</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-78), French political philosopher; Charles de Secondat Montesquieu, French philosopher.

<sup>95</sup> Adam Smith (1723-90), Scottish political economist and philosopher.

<sup>96</sup> Richard I (1157-99), King of England, and Philip II (1165-1223), King of France.

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from reproaching you with this in any way—as the older of the guilty parties, I certainly have no right to do so.

On the contrary. But I would like all the same to draw your attention to this point for the future.

In connection with this is the fatuous notion of the ideologist that, because we deny an independent historical development to the various ideological spheres which play a part in history, we also deny them any *effect upon history*. The basis of this is the common undialectical conception of cause and effect as rigidly opposite poles, the total disregarding of interaction. These gentlemen often (almost deliberately) forget that once a historic element has been brought into the world by other, ultimately economic causes, it reacts, can react on its environment and even on the causes that have given rise to it. For instance, Barth on the priesthood and religion, on your page 475. I was very glad to see how you dealt with this fellow whose banality exceeds all expectation; and him they make professor of history in Leipzig! I must say that old man Wachsmuth—also rather a bonehead but greatly appreciative of facts—was quite a different chap.<sup>97</sup>

As for the rest, I can only repeat about the book what I repeatedly said about the articles when they appeared in the *Neue Zeit*: it is by far the best presentation in existence of the genesis of the Prussian state. Indeed, I may well say that it is the only good presentation, correctly developing in most matters their interconnection down to the smallest details.

### ENGELS, from Letter to Laura Lafargue,<sup>98</sup> September 18, 1893

Yesterday we were in the Freie Volksbühne—the Lessing Theatre, one of the nicest and best of Berlin had been hired for the occasion.<sup>99</sup> The seats

<sup>97</sup> Ernst Wilhelm Gottlieb Wachsmuth (1784-1866), German historian, also a professor in Leipzig.

<sup>98</sup> Laura Lafargue, née Marx (1845-1911), Marx's second daughter.

<sup>99</sup> This letter was written in English by Engels while on his first visit to Germany in forty years. The *Freie Bühne* ("Free Stage") was founded by Otto Brahm in 1889 to introduce the Naturalistic drama of Ibsen, Zola, Tolstoy, etc., to Berlin and Germany after decades of sterile theatrical production. It inspired the membership-controlled bargain-priced *Freie Volksbühne* ("Free People's Stage") (1890), organized by people close to the Social-Democratic Party and the trade unions primarily for a working-class audience. Berlin's best directors and actors were hired to perform both in Naturalistic pieces (the play seen by Engels was Hermann Sudermann's *Heimat*) and in plays by Shakespeare, Goethe and Schiller; the latter group proved much the more popular owing to their vitality and winning attitude, while of the Naturalistic group, only Hauptmann's *The Weavers* had comparable appeal. Franz Mehring analyzed the *Freie Volksbühne* in a notable critique (*Neue Zeit*, October 21, 1896). Engels' "short review", if written, does not survive.

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are drawn for as in a lottery by the subscribers and you see working men and girls in the stalls and boxes, while bourgeois may be relegated to the gods. The public is of an attention, a devotion, I might say, an enthusiasm sans égal [without equal]. Not a sign of applause until the curtain falls—then a veritable storm. But in pathetic scenes—torrents of tears. No wonder the actors prefer this public to any other. The piece was rather good and the acting far superior to what I had expected. The *Kleinbürgerei* [provincialism] of old has disappeared from the German stage, both in the acting and in the character of the pieces. I will send you a short review of the latter.

# The Problem of Realism

ENGELS, from "Rapid Progress of Communism in Germany" (1844)

Up to the present time our stronghold is the middle class, a fact which will perhaps astonish the English reader, if he does not know that this class in Germany is far more disinterested, impartial, and intelligent, than in England, and for the very simple reason, because it is poorer. We, however, hope to be in a short time supported by the working classes, who always, and everywhere, must form the strength and body of the Socialist party, and who have been aroused from their lethargy by misery, oppression, and want of employment, as well as by the manufacturing riots in Silesia and Bohemia. Let me on this occasion mention a painting by one of the best German painters, Hübner,<sup>100</sup> which has made a more effectual Socialist agitation than a hundred pamphlets might have done. It represents some Silesian weavers bringing linen cloth to the manufacturer, and contrasts very strikingly cold-hearted wealth on one side, and despairing poverty on the other. The well-fed manufacturer is represented with a face as red and unfeeling as brass, rejecting a piece of cloth which belongs to a woman; the woman, seeing no chance of selling the cloth, is sinking down and fainting, surrounded by her two little children, and hardly kept up by an old man; a clerk is looking over a piece, the owners of which are with painful anxiety waiting for the result; a young man shows to his desponding mother the scanty wages he has received for his labour; an old man, a girl, and a boy, are sitting on a stone bench, and waiting for their turn; and two men, each with a piece of rejected cloth on his back, are just leaving the room, one of whom is clenching his fist in rage, whilst the other, putting his hand on his neighbour's arm, points up towards heaven, as if saying: be quiet, there is a judge to punish him. This whole scene is going on in a cold and unhomely looking lobby, with a stone floor: only the manufacturer stands upon a piece of carpetting; whilst on the other side of the painting, behind a bar, a view is opened into a luxuriously furnished counting-house, with splendid curtains and looking-glasses, where some clerks are writing, undisturbed by what is passing behind them, and where the manufacturer's son, a young, dandy-like gentleman, is leaning over the bar, with a horsewhip in his hand,

<sup>100</sup> Karl W. Hübner (1814-1879). German painter of the Düsseldorf realist school. The painting, "The Silesian Weavers", is in the Kunstmuseum, Düsseldorf, and is reproduced overleaf. For a discussion of the painting and of Hübner, see Margaret A. Rose, *Marx's Lost Aesthetic: Karl Marx and the Visual Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 104-11. In this article for the English Chartist weekly, *New Moral World* (13 December 1844), Engels also translated Heinrich Heine's poem on the weavers' uprising, "Song of the Silesian Weavers".

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smoking a cigar, and coolly looking at the distressed weavers. This painting has been exhibited in several towns of Germany, and, of course, prepared a good many minds for Social ideas.





## **The Problem of Realism**

### **MARX, from "The English Middle Class" (1854)**

The present splendid brotherhood of fiction writers in England, whose graphic and eloquent pages have issued to the world more political and social truths than have been uttered by all the professional politicians, publicists and moralists put together, have described every section of the middle class from the "highly genteel" annuitant and fundholder, who looks upon all sorts of business as vulgar, to the little shopkeeper and lawyer's clerk. And how have Dickens and Thackeray, Miss Brontë and Mrs. Gaskell painted them?<sup>101</sup> As full of presumption, affectation, petty tyranny and ignorance; and the civilised world have confirmed their verdict with the damning epigram that it has fixed to this class "that they are servile to those above, and tyrannical to those beneath them".

### **MARX, from Letter to Frederick Engels, November 24, 1858**

[In the literary weekly published by Robert] Prutz that dolt Ruge has proven that "Shakespeare was no dramatic poet" because he "had no philosophical system", while Schiller, because he was a Kantian, is a *truly* "dramatic poet". In response, Prutz has written a "vindication of Shakespeare!"<sup>102</sup>

### **MARX, from Letter to Ferdinand Lassalle, April 19, 1859**

Secondly: The conflict chosen<sup>103</sup> is not only tragic but is the tragic conflict

<sup>101</sup> All English novelists: Charles Dickens (1812-70); William Makepeace Thackeray (1811-63); Charlotte Brontë (1816-55); and Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-65).

<sup>102</sup> Robert Eduard Prutz (1816-1872), German poet and literary historian, associated with the Young Hegelians: Arnold Ruge (1802-1880), a Young Hegelian, radical publicist, and political leader, whose activity forced him to emigrate to England for a long time. His essays unfavourably comparing Shakespeare with Schiller were published in honour of the latter's birth centenary.

<sup>103</sup> The initial part of this letter is separately presented in the section on "Form and Style". Ferdinand Lassalle (1825-1864), a lawyer, author, compelling speaker and brilliant organizer of the German working class, who had known Marx and Engels from the 1848-49 Revolution, wrote the tragedy *Franz von Sickingen* in 1858-59. Sickingen was, with Ulrich von Hutten, the leader of the uprising of the Swabian and Rheinland knights in 1522-23 on which the play is based. Sickingen led the knighted nobility against the dukes and above all the archbishop of Trier; he was killed when the knights abandoned him. On March 6, 1859, Lassalle had sent the playscript to Marx together with an essay outlining the tragic idea underlying the play. *Franz von Sickingen* was translated into English by Daniel DeLeon (1910).

which unerringly caused the wreck of the revolutionary party of 1848-49.<sup>104</sup> I can therefore only approve most highly the intention of making it the pivot of a modern tragedy. Yet, I ask myself whether the subject chosen by you is appropriate for the presentation of this conflict. Balthasar<sup>105</sup> can actually imagine that if Sickingen had raised the flag of battle against the emperor and declared open war against the dukes rather than concealing his revolt beneath a knightly feud, he would have been victorious. But can we share this illusion? Sickingen (and with him Hutten, more or less) did not lose because of his wiles. He went down in defeat because, as a *knight* and a *representative of a perishing class*, he rose up against the existing order or rather against its new form. If you strip away from Sickingen all that pertains to his individuality by way of particular training, natural gifts, etc., then we are left with—Götz von Berlichingen.<sup>106</sup> The tragic opposition of the knighthood against the emperor and the dukes is embodied in this *wretched* figure and given in its appropriate form and Goethe rightly chose him for the hero. In so far as Sickingen—and even to some extent Hutten, although with respect to him, as with respect to all class ideologists, judgments must be modified considerably—struggles against the dukes (his demarche against the emperor can be explained only by the fact the emperor transforms himself from the emperor of the knights into the emperor of dukes), he is simply a Don Quixote,<sup>107</sup> although historically justified. The fact that he begins the revolt under the guise of a feud among the knights only means that he begins it *as a knight*. If he were to begin it otherwise, he would have to appeal directly and at once to the cities and peasants, that is, to those very classes whose development amounts to the negation of knighthood.

If then you did not want to reduce the conflict to the one in *Götz von Berlichingen*—and this was not your intention—Sickingen and Hutten had to perish because in their own imaginations they were revolutionists

<sup>104</sup> The initial part of this letter is separately presented in the section on "Form and Style". Ferdinand Lassalle (1825-1864), a lawyer, author, compelling speaker and brilliant organizer of the German working class, who had known Marx and Engels from the 1848-49 Revolution, wrote the tragedy *Frantz von Sickingen* in 1858-59. Sickingen was, with Ulrich von Hutten, the leader of the uprising of the Swabian and Rheinland knights in 1522-23 on which the play is based. Sickingen led the knighted nobility against the dukes and above all the archbishop of Trier; he was killed when the knights abandoned him. On March 6, 1859, Lassalle had sent the playscript to Marx together with an essay outlining the tragic idea underlying the play. *Franz von Sickingen* was translated into English by Daniel DeLeon (1910).

<sup>105</sup> Balthasar Stör, Sickingen's servant.

<sup>106</sup> *Götz von Berlichingen* is a play written by the young Goethe (1771).

<sup>107</sup> The self-deluding hero of the novel *Don Quixote de la Mancha*, (1605, 1615), by Miguel de Cervantes (1547-1616)

## The Problem of Realism

(which cannot be said of Götz) and, completely like the *educated* Polish nobility of 1830,<sup>108</sup> they made themselves on the one hand into spokesmen of contemporary ideas, and on the other, representatives indeed of reactionary class interests. In this case, then, the *noble* representatives of revolution,—behind whose slogans of unity and liberty the hope of the old imperial power and fistic right is concealed—should not take up all the interest as in your play, but the representatives of the peasantry (especially them) and the revolutionary elements in the cities should have provided an important and active background for your play. Then you could have expressed in much greater measure the most modern ideas in their purest form. As it is the major theme of your play, together with *religious* freedom, remains *civil unity*. You would then have *Shakespearized* more; at present, there is too much *Schillerism*, which means making individuals into mere mouthpieces of the spirit of the times, and this is your main fault. Did you not, to a certain extent, like your own Franz von Sickingen, make the same diplomatic mistake of setting the Lutheran-knightly opposition higher than the plebian Münzer one?<sup>109</sup>

Further, I do not find any characteristic traits in your characters, with the exception of Charles V,<sup>110</sup> Balthasar, and Richard of Trier.<sup>111</sup> And is there any other period with such sharp characters as the XVI century? Your Hutten,<sup>112</sup> to my mind, is much too much a mere representative of “enthusiasm”, and this is boring. Wasn’t he both pretty clever and a jokester, and haven’t you therefore handled him unjustly?

To what extent even your Sickingen (also, by the way, drawn much too abstractly) is the victim of a conflict independent of all his personal calculations can be seen from his finding it necessary to preach to his knights about friendship with the city, etc., and, on the other hand, from how much pleasure it gives him to exercise club-law over the cities.

As to particular points of criticism, you sometimes allow your

<sup>108</sup> Marx refers to the Polish uprising against Tsarist rule which began in November of that year and was led by the Polish nobility. The nobility failed to gain the support of the peasantry because they refused to meet the latter’s demands for the abolition of serfdom, and their uprising was consequently violently suppressed by the Tsarist government.

<sup>109</sup> Martin Luther favoured a moderate reform, suited to the needs of the lower nobility, the middle class in the cities, and the more advanced dukes. In contrast, Thomas Münzer had urged the end of feudalism. Münzer’s peasant army was defeated in May 1525, and he was captured, tortured and killed.

<sup>110</sup> Charles V (1500-1558), Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire (1519-56) and King of Spain (1516-56).

<sup>111</sup> Richard, Elector and Archbishop of Trier (1511-31), took part in the suppression of the Knights’ revolt (1522-3) and peasant insurrection (1525-6)

<sup>112</sup> Ulrich von Hutten (1488-23), German poet and a supporter of the Reformation, was a leader of the Knights’ uprising of 1522-3.

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characters much too much self-reflection—which is due to your preference for Schiller. Thus on page 121, where Hutten is telling Maria his life history, it would have been highly natural to have allowed Maria to say:

“All the gamut of sensations”,

and so on to

“And weightier than load of years it is.”

The preceding verses from “They say” to “grown old” could then be made to follow after, but the reflection “A night is all a maiden needs to become a woman” (although it shows that Maria knows more than mere abstract love) was entirely unnecessary; and Maria’s beginning discussion of her own “ageing” is altogether misplaced. After she has told all that she has in the “one” hour, she could express the general feeling of her mood in the sentence on her growing old. Furthermore, I am disturbed by the following lines: “I thought it was a *right*” (i.e., happiness). Why rob Maria of the naïve view of the world which she maintains up until that point by turning it into a doctrine of rights? Perhaps I shall be able to give you my opinion in more detail on another occasion.

I think the scene between Sickingen and Charles V very good, although the dialogue on both sides comes to sound more like lawyers holding forth in court; the scenes in Trier are also very good. Hutten’s speech on the sword is excellent.

But enough for now.

In the person of my wife you have won a warm adherent of your drama. Only she is not satisfied with Maria.

Salut  
K.M.

**ENGELS, from Letter to Ferdinand Lassalle, May 18, 1859**

With regard to the historical content,<sup>113</sup> you have presented the two sides of the movement of that time which were most important for you, and in such a way that they are quite obvious and justifiably pertinent to subsequent developments of the national movement of the nobility, represented by Sickingen, and the humanistic-theoretical movement with its later development in the area of the church and theology—the Reformation. The best scenes here are between Sickingen and the emperor, between the papal legate and the archbishop of Trier (here you

<sup>113</sup> The first part of this letter is presented in the section on “Form and Style”.

## The Problem of Realism

have succeeded in rendering excellent individual characterizations in the antithesis between the worldly legate, educated in the classics and aesthetics, politically and theoretically far-seeing, and the narrow-minded German duke of the priests, and they follow distinctly from the *representative* characters of the persons); the characterization in the scene between Sickingen and Charles is also very striking. With Hutten's autobiography, the *contents* of which you justly consider essential, you chose a very risky means of inserting this content in the drama. The dialogue between Franz and Balthasar in the fifth act, in which the latter tells his master of the *genuinely revolutionary* policy he should have followed is also of great importance. Here is where the genuine tragedy becomes apparent, and precisely because of its significance, I feel it should have been more strongly suggested in the third act where there were more opportunities to do so. But I am slipping back again into secondary matters.—The standpoint of the cities and of the dukes of that time is also presented very clearly in several places, and thus, the so-to-speak *official* elements of the movement of that time are nearly exhausted. It seems to me, however, that you have not paid sufficient attention to the unofficial, plebeian and peasant elements with their concomitant theoretical representation. The peasant movement was in its way just as national, just as opposed to the dukes as was the movement of the nobility, and the colossal dimensions of the struggle in which the peasants succumbed stand in great contrast to the ease with which the nobility, leaving Sickingen to his fate, acquiesced again in its historical rôle of court servility. Therefore, it seems to me that even with your conception of the drama which is, as you now see, to my mind somewhat too abstract and insufficiently realistic, the peasant movement deserved more attention. To be sure, the peasant scene with Jost Fritz is characteristic, and the individuality of this "agitator" is rendered very correctly, but in contraposition to the nobility movement, it does not represent adequately the peasant agitation which by then had already increased to its boiling point. In *my* view of drama, the realistic should not be neglected in favour of the intellectual elements, nor Shakespeare in favour of Schiller. Had you introduced the wonderfully variegated plebeian social sphere of that time, it would have lent entirely new material which would have enlivened and provided an indispensable background for the action being played out on the forestage by the national movement of the nobility and it would at last have thrown proper light on this very movement. What wonderfully expressive characters are to be found during this period of the breakdown of feudalism—penniless ruling kings, impoverished hireling

soldiers and adventurers of all sorts—a Falstaffian background that, in an historical play of *this* type, would be much more effective than in Shakespeare!<sup>114</sup> But, aside from this, it seems to me that the neglect of the peasant movement has led you in one respect to draw even the nationalist movement of the nobility incorrectly, and the *real* tragic element in Sickingen's fate has escaped you. In my opinion, the majority of the imperial aristocracy at that time did not think of forming an alliance with the peasantry: their dependence on the income from the oppressed peasantry did not permit this. An alliance with the cities was more feasible; but this was never realized or was realized only very partially. Yet, the success of the national revolution of the nobility was possible only through an alliance with the cities and peasantry, especially the latter; and this, to my mind, was the tragic circumstance, that the basic condition, an alliance with the peasantry, was impossible, that the policy of the nobility had necessarily to be trivial, that at the very moment when it wished to represent the national movement, the masses of the nation, the peasantry, protested against its leadership, and so it necessarily had to fall. I have no means of judging in how far you are historically correct in assuming that Sickingen was in some way really associated with the peasantry, nor is this of much importance. By the way, as far as I remember, Hutten's writings, where he appeals to the peasantry, carefully avoid this ticklish question of the nobility and attempt to direct all the anger of the peasants against the priests. However, I do not in the least take issue against your right to portray Sickingen and Hutten as if they had intended to liberate the peasants. But here you had at once the tragic contradiction: they both stood between a *nobility* decidedly *opposed to this* on the one side, and the peasantry on the other. In my opinion, this constituted the tragic conflict between the historically necessary postulate and the practical impossibility of its realization. When you let this moment slip, you reduce the tragic conflict to lesser dimensions, setting Sickingen immediately against only *one* duke and not against the emperor and empire (although you do bring in the peasants here at the right moment), and he perishes, according to you, simply on account of the indifference and cowardliness of the nobles. But this would have been grounded altogether differently if you had stressed the growing wrath of the peasantry earlier as well as the definitely more conservative mood of the nobility as a result of the previous peasant "Bundschuh" and "Armer Konrad"<sup>115</sup> rebellions. This is only one of many ways in which it would be

<sup>114</sup> The reference is to Falstaff, the "knightly" character who appears in Shakespeare's *Henry IV, I* and *II*, and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

<sup>115</sup> The *Bundschuh* (a kind of shoe worn by medieval peasants) and *Armer Konrad* ("Poor Konrad") were the greatest peasant rebel movements in early sixteenth century Germany.

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possible to introduce the peasant and plebeian movements into the drama; there are at least ten other ways just as conceivable or more so.

As you see, I approach your work with very high criteria—in fact the *highest* from an aesthetic and historical viewpoint—and if it is thus that I raise objections, it is proof of my estimation of your work. *Mutual* criticism has long, in the interests of the party, assumed as candid a character as possible. On the whole, it always gives me and all of us pleasure to find new proof that whatever field the party enters, it always shows its superiority. And that is what you have done this time also.

### MARX, from Letter to Nannette Philips,<sup>116</sup> March 24, 1861

I arrived at Berlin on Sunday last (18<sup>th</sup> March), at 7 o'clock in the morning. My travel was not marked by any incident save a 6½ hours' delay at Oberhausen, an abominably tedious little place. Lassalle, who lives in a very fine house, situated in one of the finest streets of Berlin, had everything prepared for my reception, and gave me a most friendly welcome. The first hours having been talked away and my railway fatigue chased by some rest and some refreshment, Lassalle introduced me at once to the house of the Countess of Hatzfeldt who, as I soon became aware, dines every day in his house at 4 o'clock p.m., and passes her evenings with him. I found her hair as "blonde" and her eyes as blue as formerly, but for the remainder of her face I read the words imprinted on it: twenty and twenty make fifty-seven. There were in fact wrinkles full of "vestiges of creation", there were cheeks and chin betraying an embonpoint which, like coal beds, want much time to be formed, and so forth. As to her eyebrows, I was at once struck by the circumstance that they had improved instead of deteriorating, so that art had by far got the better of nature. On later occasions I made the general remark that she perfectly understands the art of making herself up and of finding in her toilette-box the tints no longer derived from her blood. Upon the whole she reminded me of some Greek statues which still boast of fine bust but whose heads have been cruelly "beknappered" by the vicissitudes of time. Still, to be not unjust, she is a very distinguished lady, no blue-stocking, of great natural intellect, much vivacity, deeply interested in the revolutionary movement, and of an aristocratic *laissez aller* [lack of restraint] very superior to the pedantic grimaces of professional *femmes d'esprit* [women of spirit]...

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They had developed as early as 1514, and they triggered the Peasant War of 1525-6.

<sup>116</sup> Antoinette Philips, Marx's cousin.

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On Tuesday evening Lassalle and the countess led me to a Berlin theatre where a Berlin comedy, full of Prussian self-glorification, was enacted. It was altogether a disgusting affair. On Wednesday evening I was forced by them to assist at the performance of a ballet in the opera house. We had a box for ourselves at the side—*horribile dictu* [horrible to relate]—of the king's "loge". Such a ballet is characteristic of Berlin. It forms not, as at Paris, or at London, an *entrejeu* [performance between acts], or the conclusion, of an opera, but it absorbs the whole evening, is divided into several acts, etc. Not a syllable is spoken by the actors, but everything is hinted at by mimicry. It is in fact deadly—dully. The scenery, however, was beautiful; you assisted for instance at a sea-voyage from Livorno to Naples: sea, mountains, seacoast, towns etc., everything being represented with photographic truth.

#### **ENGELS, from Letter to Laura Lafargue, December 13, 1883**

By the bye I have been reading nothing but Balzac while laid up, and enjoyed the grand old fellow thoroughly.<sup>117</sup> *There* is the history of France from 1815 to 1848, far more than in all the Vaulabellés, Capefigues, Louis Blancs *et tutti quanti* [all the rest of them].<sup>118</sup> And what boldness! What a revolutionary dialectic in his poetical justice!

#### **ENGELS, from Letter to Minna Kautsky, November 26, 1885**

I have read *The Old and the New*, for which I am heartily grateful to you.<sup>119</sup> The life of the workers of the salt diggings is described in just such a masterly way as the life of the peasants in *Stefan*. Also most of the scenes of Viennese society are very good. Vienna indeed is the only German city where there is any society; in Berlin, there are only "certain circles", and still more uncertain ones, and it therefore offers a basis only for novels about the literati, bureaucrats and actors. Whether the

<sup>117</sup> Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850), French novelist.

<sup>118</sup> Achille Tenaillé de Vaulabelle (1799-1879), French historian and politician, author of *History of Two Restorations* (1847-54); Jean Baptiste Honoré Raymond Capfigue, prolific French Historian and royalist, best known for his *History of Philippe-Auguste* (1829); Louis Blanc (1811-82), French petty-bourgeois socialist, member of the Provisional Government of 1848, published *A History of Ten Years (1830-40)* in 1841-44.

<sup>119</sup> *Die Alten und die Neuen*, the novel here discussed by Engels, appeared in the periodical *Die neue Welt* in 1884. Minna Kautsky (1837-1912), the mother of Karl Kautsky, was well-known to the Social-Democratic movement for her social novels and stories. *Stefan von Grillenhof* was her first novel, published in the same journal five years earlier.



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motivation of the action in this part of your work does not develop a little too hastily is easier for you to judge than for me. Much of what produces such an impression on us may be perfectly natural in Vienna, with its own sort of international character, full of southern and eastern European elements. The characters in both milieus are drawn with your usual precision of individualization. Each person is a type, but at the same time a distinct personality, *ein dieser* [this one] as old Hegel would say. That is as it should be. But to be properly nonpartisan I must set out to find something wrong, and here I come to Arnold. In truth, he is too faultless, and, if at last he perishes by falling from a mountain, one can reconcile this with poetic justice only by saying that he was too good for this world. It is always bad for an author to be infatuated with his hero, and it seems to me that in this case you have somewhat succumbed to this weakness. Elsa still has traces of personality, although she is also idealized, but in Arnold personality is dissolved in principle.

The root of this defect is indicated, by the way, in the novel itself. Evidently you felt the need in this book to declare publicly for your party, to bear witness before the whole world and show your convictions. Now you have done this; you have it behind you and have no need to do so again in this form. I am not at all an opponent of tendentious writing [*Tendenzpoesie*] as such. The father of tragedy, Aeschylus, and the father of comedy, Aristophanes,<sup>120</sup> were both strong tendentious poets, as were Dante and Cervantes, and the main merit of Schiller's *Love and Intrigue* [*Kabale und Liebe*] is that it is the first German political tendentious drama [*Tendenzdrama*]. Contemporary Russian and Norwegian authors, who are writing superlative novels, are all tendentious. But I believe the tendency must spring forth from the situation and the action itself, without explicit attention called to it; the writer is not obliged to offer to the reader the future historical solution of the social conflicts he depicts. Especially in our conditions, the novel primarily finds readers in bourgeois circles, circles not directly related to our own, and there the socialist tendentious novel can fully achieve its purpose, in my view, if, by conscientiously describing the real mutual relations, it breaks down the conventionalized illusions dominating them, shatters the optimism of the bourgeois world, causes doubt about the eternal validity of the existing order, and this without directly offering a solution or even, under some circumstances, taking an ostensible partisan stand. Your exact knowledge both of the Austrian peasantry and of Viennese "society" and your marvellous freshness in depicting them here provide a great quantity of material,

<sup>120</sup> Aeschylus (c.525-c.456 BC), Greek tragedian, and Aristophanes (c.448-c.388 BC), Greek comic dramatist.

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while in *Stefan* you proved that you knew how to manage your heroes with that fine irony which demonstrates the mastery of the writer over his creation.

**ENGELS, from Letter to Margaret Harkness, Beginning of April 1888 (draft)**

Dear Miss H[arkness],

I thank you very much for sending me through Messrs. Vizetelly<sup>121</sup> your *City Girl*.<sup>122</sup> I have read it with the greatest pleasure and avidity. It is, indeed, as my friend Eichhoff your translator calls it, *ein kleines Kunstwerk* [a small work of art]; to which he adds, what will be satisfactory to you, that consequently his translation must be all but literal, as any omission or attempted manipulation could only destroy part of the original's value.

What strikes me most in your tale besides its realistic truth is that it exhibits the courage of the true artist. Not only in the way you treat the Salvation Army, in the teeth of supercilious respectability, which respectability will perhaps learn from your tale, for the first time, *why* the Salvation Army has such a hold on the popular masses.<sup>123</sup> But chiefly in the plain unvarnished manner in which you make the old, old story, the proletarian girl seduced by a middle class man, the pivot of the whole book. Mediocrity would have felt bound to hide the, to it, commonplace character of the plot under heaps of artificial complications and adornments, and yet would not have got rid of the fate of being found out. You felt you could afford to tell an old story, because you could make it a new one by simply telling it truly.

Your Mr. Arthur Grant is a masterpiece.

If I have anything to criticise, it would be that perhaps after all, the tale is not quite realistic enough. Realism, to my mind, implies, besides truth of detail, the truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances. Now your characters are typical enough, as far as they go;

<sup>121</sup> i.e. the publishing house of Henry Vizetelly (1820-94).

<sup>122</sup> *A City Girl: A Realistic Story* appeared in 1887. Margaret Harkness published several novels on English working-class life under the pseudonym John Law. A friend of Marx's daughter Eleanor, she had lived in Engels' house and was a member of the Social Democratic Federation. Engels thought *A City Girl* and her subsequent *Out of Work* were useful socialist literature, and he asked the German writer Wilhelm Karl Eichhoff (1833-95), mentioned here, to translate them both. Engels wrote this draft of his letter to Harkness in English.

<sup>123</sup> The Salvation Army was a Christian organisation aimed at helping the poor and destitute, founded in London in 1878 by William Booth (1829-1912).

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but the circumstances which surround them and make them act, are not perhaps equally so. In the "City Girl" the working class figures as a passive mass, unable to help itself and not even making any attempt at striving to help itself. All attempts to drag it out of its torpid misery come from without, from above. Now if this was a correct description about 1800 or 1810, in the days of Saint Simon and Robert Owen,<sup>124</sup> it cannot appear so in 1887 to a man who for nearly fifty years has had the honour of sharing in most of the fights of the militant proletariat. The rebellious reaction of the working class against the oppressive medium which surrounds them, their attempts—convulsive, half-conscious or conscious—at recovering their status as human beings, belong to history and must therefore lay claim to a place in the domain of realism.

I am far from finding fault with your not having written a point blank socialist novel, a "Tendenzroman" as we Germans call it, to glorify the social and political views of the author. That is not at all what I mean. The more the opinions of the author remain hidden, the better for the work of art. The realism I allude to, may crop out even in spite of the author's opinions. Let me refer to an example. Balzac whom I consider a far greater master of realism than all the Zolas<sup>125</sup> *passés, présents et à venir* [past, present, and future], in *La Comédie humaine* gives us a most wonderfully realistic history of French "Society", describing, chronicle-fashion, almost year by year from 1816 to 1848, the progressive inroads of the rising bourgeoisie upon the society of nobles, that reconstituted itself after 1815 and that set up again, as far as it could, the standard of *la vieille politesse française* [the old French ways]. He describes how the last remnants of this, to him, model society gradually succumbed before the intrusion of the vulgar moneyed upstart, or were corrupted by him; how the grande dame whose conjugal infidelities were but a mode of asserting herself in perfect accordance with the way she had been disposed of in marriage, gave way to the bourgeoisie, who corned her husband for cash or cashmere; and around this central picture he groups a complete history of French Society from which, even in economical details (for instance the re-arrangement of real and personal property after the Revolution) I have learned more than from all the professed historians, economists and statisticians of the period together. Well, Balzac was politically a Legitimist; his great work is a constant elegy on the irretrievable decay of good society; his sympathies are all with the class doomed to extinction. But for all that his satire is never keener, his irony never bitterer than

<sup>124</sup> Both "utopian" socialists: Claude Henri Saint-Simon (1760-1825), French aristocrat and writer, and Robert Owen (1771-1858), Welsh social and educational reformer.

<sup>125</sup> Émile Zola (1840-1902), French naturalist novelist.

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when he sets in motion the very men and women with whom he sympathises most deeply—the nobles. And the only men of whom he always speaks with undisguised admiration, are his bitterest political antagonists, the republican heroes of the Cloître Saint Merri [*Méry*], the men, who at that time (1830-36) were indeed the representatives of the popular masses.<sup>126</sup> That Balzac thus was compelled to go against his own class sympathies and political prejudices, that he *saw* the necessity of the downfall of his favourite nobles, and described them as people deserving no better fate; and that he *saw* the real men of the future where, for the time being, they alone were to be found—that I consider one of the greatest triumphs of Realism, and one of the grandest features in old Balzac.

I must own, in your defence, that nowhere in the civilised world are the working people less actively resistent, more passively submitting to fate, more *hébétés* [dulled] than in the East End of London. And how do I know whether you have not had very good reasons for contenting yourself, for once, with a picture of the passive side of working class life, reserving the active side for another work?

<sup>126</sup> Next to this cloister, on June 5-6, 1832, the leftwing supporters of the Republican party, the Society of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, fought a last-ditch battle on the barricades against the troops of Louis-Philippe.

# Tendency Literature

## MARX, from *The Holy Family* (1845)

As bad painters must label their painting to say what it is supposed to represent, Eugène Sue must put a label in "*bull-dog*" Chourineur's mouth so that he constantly affirms: "The two words, 'You still have heart and honour', made a *man* out of me."<sup>127</sup> Till his very last breath Chourineur will find the motives for his actions, not in his human individuality, but in that label. As a proof of his moral amendment he will often reflect on his own excellence and the wickedness of other individuals. And every time he throws about moralizing expressions, Rudolph will say to him: "I like to hear you *speak* like that." Chourineur has not become an ordinary *bull-dog* but a *moral one*...

The most wretched offal of socialist literature, a sample of which we find in this novelist, reveal "mysteries" still unknown to Critical Criticism.

## ENGELS, from *The New York Daily Tribune*, October 28, 1851

The political movement of the middle class or bourgeoisie, in Germany, may be dated from 1840. It had been preceded by symptoms showing that the moneyed and industrial class of that country was ripening into a state which would no longer allow it to continue apathetic and passive under the pressure of a half-feudal, half-bureaucratic Monarchism...

German literature, too, laboured under the influence of the political excitement into which all Europe had been thrown by the events of 1830. A crude Constitutionalism, or a still cruder Republicanism, were preached by almost all writers of the time. It became more and more the habit, particularly of the inferior sorts of literati, to make up for the want of cleverness in their productions, by political allusions which were sure to attract attention. Poetry, novels, reviews, the drama, every literary production teemed with what was called "tendency", that is with more or less timid exhibitions of an anti-governmental spirit. In order to complete the confusion of ideas reigning after 1830 in Germany, with these elements of political opposition there were mixed up ill-digested university recollections of German philosophy, and misunderstood gleanings from French Socialism, particularly Saint-Simonism; and the clique of writers who expatiated upon this heterogeneous conglomerate of ideas, presumptuously called themselves "Young Germany", or "the Modern School". They have since repented their youthful sins, but not improved their style of writing.<sup>128</sup>

<sup>127</sup> The discussion concerns Sue's novel *The Mysteries of Paris*.

<sup>128</sup> In the section on "Form and Style" we print a letter from Engels to Wilhelm Gräber of

**MARX, from Letter to Joseph Weydemeyer, January 16, 1852**

I am enclosing a poem and a private letter by Freiligrath.<sup>129</sup> Now I ask you to: (1) Have the poem printed carefully; the stanzas separated at adequate intervals, and the whole thing printed without an eye to saving space. Poetry loses much when the verses are printed all crowded together. (2) Write a friendly letter to Freiligrath. Don't be afraid to compliment him, for all poets, even the best of them, are *plus ou moins des courtisanes, et il faut les cajoler, pour les faire chanter* [courtesans, more or less, and they have to be cajoled to make them sing]. Our F[reiligrath] is the kindest, most unassuming man in private life, who conceals *un esprit très fin et très railleur* [a very subtle and mocking spirit] underneath his genuine simplicity, and whose pathos is "genuine" without making him "uncritical" and superstitious. He is a real revolutionary and an honest man through and through—praise that I would not mete out to many. Nevertheless, a poet—no matter what he may be as a man—requires applause, admiration. I think it lies in the very nature of the species. I am telling you all this merely to call your attention to the fact that in your correspondence with Freiligrath you must not forget the difference between a "poet" and a "critic". Moreover, it is very nice of him to address his poetic letter directly to you. I think, this will give you something by way of contrast in New York.

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October 8, 1839, which shows Engels at nineteen still enthusiastic about entering the "Modern School" of writing. However, as early as June 1842, in a book review of Alexander Jung's *Vorlesungen über die moderne Literatur der Deutschen* [Lectures on Modern German Literature], Engels adopted a position similar to that of 1851-52 printed above. Bitingly, he attacked Jung (1799-1884) for categorizing the "beauties" of the Young Germany style while having no understanding of its political implications: "He has learned nothing, forgotten nothing. The Young Germany movement has passed, the Young Hegelian movement has emerged; Strauss, Feuerbach, Bauer and the *Jahrbücher* have drawn widespread attention; the struggle over principles is at its height, a life-and-death confrontation with Christianity the bone of argument; the political movement spreads everywhere, and good old Jung still naïvely thinks the 'Nation' has nothing better to do than await a new play by Gutzkow, a promising novel by Mundt, or something predictably eccentric by Laube. All Germany resounds with the cries of struggle, the new principles are debated at his very feet, and Mr. Jung sits in his neat little room, chews upon a pen, and broods over the concept of the 'Modern'."

<sup>129</sup> Ferdinand Freiligrath (1810-1876). German revolutionary poet, member of the editorial committee of *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* and the Communist League (*Bund der Kommunisten*); and Joseph Weydemeyer (1818-1886). Communist League member and 1848er who emigrated in 1851 to the U.S., where he started the magazine *Revolution*.

## Tendency Literature

### MARX, from Letter to Frederick Engels, May 8, 1856

Apropos! I've seen Heine's Testament! Return to the "living God" and an "Apology Before God and Man" if anything he ever wrote was "immoral"!

### MARX, from Letter to Ferdinand Freiligrath, February 29, 1860

Of the "party" in the sense of your letter I have known *nothing* since 1852...<sup>130</sup>

I have openly told you my view, which I hope you share in essentials. I have further tried to dispel the misunderstanding that I mean by "party", a *Bund* now eight years dead or a newspaper editorial committee dissolved twelve years ago. By party I have understood the party in the great historical sense.

<sup>130</sup> Ferdinand Freiligrath was an editor of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* in 1848-49 when Marx was chief editor. Marx wrote these words when a break of personal ties between himself and Freiligrath seemed imminent. It was triggered when a friend of G. Kinkel, a politically liberal German poet living in exile in London, to whom Freiligrath had grown closer, published an article in praise of Freiligrath, in which Marx's dark influence was claimed to have nearly destroyed the poet's talent. Marx responded to this in a letter to Freiligrath of November 23, 1859: "If one wanted *wrongly* to ascribe to me any influence on you, this could have been only in the brief period of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, when you wrote your very famous and certainly most popular poems." The immediate reason for Marx's paragraph on the party in "the great historical sense" was a letter to him of the day before, in which Freiligrath wrote, among other things: "Although I have always remained true to the banner of the *classe la plus laborieuse et la plus miserable* [the hardest working and most miserable class] and always will, you know as well as I do that my relationship to the Party as it was and to the Party as it is are of a different nature. When the *Bund* was dissolved at the end of 1852 as the result of the Cologne Trials, I laid aside all the bonds which the party as such laid on me, and maintained only a personal relationship to *you*, my friend and comrade in *conscience*. For these seven years I have stood far from the *party*. I have not attended its meetings. I have been unaware of its decisions and acts. Thus my relationship to the party was long ago dissolved, we have never deceived one another about this, it was a kind of tacit convention between us. And I can only say that I have felt good about it. My nature and that of every poet needs freedom! The party, too, is a cage, and one can 'sing' better, even *for* the party, outside than in. I was a poet of the proletariat and the revolution long before I was a member of the *Bund* and member of the editorial committee of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*! So I will continue to stand on my own feet. I will hearken only to myself, and I will answer for myself." The earliest analysis of the Freiligrath declaration and response by Marx was provided by Franz Mehring ("Freiligrath und Marx in ihrem Briefwechsel", *Neue Zeit*, April 12, 1912). This remains a most satisfactory interpretation.

**MARX, from Letter to Frederick Engels, May 29, 1863**

As for Itzig [Ferdinand Lassalle], he has urged Freiligrath—Freiligrath told this to me in confidence (and showed me Itzig's letter)—to write a poem about the "new" movement [the *Allgemeine Deutsche Arbeiterverein*, headed by Lassalle], in other words to sing Itzig's praise. But he made a bad mistake picking Freiligrath. Among other things he says in the letter: "Hundreds of newspapers carry my name daily to the farthest corner of Germany." "My proletarians!" etc. Since Freiligrath has not sung him, he has found another poet. Here is a sample:

Come hither, German *Proletariat*!  
Come hither, heed this time a fruitful counsel!  
A man stands here prepared to lead the way to  
Your own best welfare. Now prepare to *act*!  
He has no seat in distant parliaments,  
And does not preen upon his speaking talents;  
Simple and clear, the Tribune of us all,  
The man of the people, *Ferdinand Lassalle*!

Why should you work to fill the purse of *others*  
Until your sweat rolls off into the earth,  
Why should you live in rags and know but dearth  
While *they* grow richer with each passing hour?  
The fruits of labour should be *yours* to sample,  
The blessings of the soil for *you* be ample,  
Oh may by every ear be heard the call:  
The manly words of *Ferdinand Lassalle*.

*Macte puer* [Hail stripling]! If that's not a doggerel for lice!

**ENGELS, from Letter to Karl Marx, December 21, 1866**

The old Horace<sup>131</sup> reminds me in places of Heine, who learned a great deal from him, and also was at bottom an equally ordinary hound in the political sense. One thinks of the honest obedient citizen who dared to risk *vultus instantis tyranni* [the threatening glance of the angry tyrant] only to lick the backside of Augustus.<sup>132</sup> Yet, in other respects the old wretch is very loveable.

<sup>131</sup> Quintus Horatius Flaccus (65-8 B.C.), a major Roman poet.

<sup>132</sup> The first Emperor of Rome, better known as Julius Caesar (63BC-14AD).



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ENGELS, from Letter to Eduard Bernstein,<sup>133</sup> August 17, 1881

You must not heap such compliments on Valles.<sup>134</sup> In literature, or more accurately, among the *literati*, he is a miserable phrasemaker and a worthless fellow who, due to lack of talent, has gone to extremes of dressing up his poor *Bellettrism* with a "tendentious commitment". In the Commune<sup>135</sup> he only talked big, and if he did anything else he did it badly. You should not let your Parisian comradeship (for which Malon<sup>136</sup> too has a soft spot) tie you to this *drôle de fanfaron*, this foolish loudmouth.

ENGELS, "Georg Weerth" (1883)

### *Song of the Journeyman*

Near where the cherries blossom  
In Frankfurt did we stay,  
There where the cherries blossom  
We found a place to lay.

The hostel clerk did holler:  
"You're sure a ragged pair!"  
"You fleabag rent collector,  
It's none of your affair!

Bring in some beer and wine, and  
Give us some grub to eat;  
Bring us those drinks so fine, and  
Be sure you fetch some meat!"

The tap creaked in the barrel,  
A flood of beer burst out—  
And splashed on our apparel,

<sup>133</sup> Eduard Bernstein (1850-1932), German Social-Democrat, edited the newspaper *Sozialdemokrat* (1881-90).

<sup>134</sup> Jules-Louis-Joseph Valles (1832-1885). French politician, author and journalist. A Proudhonist and member of the International Workingmen's Association, Valles took part in the Paris Commune, then emigrated to England and later Belgium, before returning to France with the 1880 amnesty of Communards.

<sup>135</sup> Engels refers to the control of Paris exercised between March and May 1871 by the Communards, a group of radicals, socialists and workers.

<sup>136</sup> Benoît Malon (1841-93), French socialist and member of the Paris Commune.

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Like urine, just about.  
They then served up a rabbit  
All garnished to the ears,  
We gulped it down by habit  
With wine to lull our fears.

We lay upon our mattress  
In hopes of forty winks  
The bedbugs at that address  
Quick lept from all the chinks.

I swear this really happened  
In lovely Frankfurt town;  
You too can know it happened  
Just take yourself on down!

I have found this poem by our friend Weerth<sup>137</sup> among the literary remains of Marx. Weerth, the first and most important poet of the German proletariat, was born in Detmold of a Rhineland family. His father was a church superintendent there. When I resided in Manchester in 1843, Weerth came to Bradford as salesman for a German firm, and we spent many a lively Sunday together. In 1845, when Marx and I lived in Brussels, Weerth took over the continental agency for his firm and arranged things so that his headquarters could also be in Brussels. After the March Revolution of 1848, we were all together in Cologne where we founded the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*. Weerth became the *feuilleton* editor [cultural editor], and I doubt whether any other paper ever had as gay and incisive a *feuilleton*. One of his chief works was "The Life and Deeds of the Famous Knight Schnapphahnski", describing the adventures of Prince Lichnowski,<sup>138</sup> dubbed thus by Heine in his *Atta Troll*. All the facts are true—how we got them will perhaps be told some other time. These Schnapphahnski *feuilletons* were made into an anthology and published in 1849 by Hoffmann and Campe. They are still very amusing. Schnapphahnski-Lichnowski met his death on September 18, 1848, in the following manner: with the Prussian General von Auerswald<sup>139</sup> (likewise a member of Parliament), he rode out with a column of peasants to spy on

<sup>137</sup> Georg Weerth (1822-1856) was a member of the Communist League and a friend of both Marx and Engels. Marx had intended such an article in 1856; Engels published this reminiscence in the *Sozialdemokrat* of June 7, 1883. The poem by Weerth is entitled *Handwerksburschenlied* (*Song of the Journeyman*) and was written in 1846.

<sup>138</sup> Felix Maria Vinzenz Andreas, Fürst Lichnowsky (1814-1848).

<sup>139</sup> Rudolf Ludwig Cäsar von Auerswald (1795-1866).

## Tendency Literature

the Frankfurt barricade fighters. The peasants killed both him and von Auerswald as spies, a fate they deserved. But then the German imperial vice-regency filed charges against Weerth for having insulted the dead Lichnowski. Weerth, who had been living in England for some time, was sentenced to three months' imprisonment, long after the editorial board of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* had been dissolved. Since he had to visit Germany on business from time to time, he actually served this sentence.

In 1850-51, he travelled to Spain, the West Indies, and throughout most of South America as representative of another Bradford firm. After a brief visit to Europe he returned to his beloved West Indies. There he could not forego the pleasure of gazing at least once upon the real original of Louis Napoleon III,<sup>140</sup> the Negro King Soulouque of Haiti.<sup>141</sup> But, as Wilhelm Wolff<sup>142</sup> wrote to Marx on August 28, 1856, he "had difficulties with the quarantine authorities, had to give up his project, and on his tour picked up the germs of yellow fever, which he brought with him to Havana. He got into bed, suffered a cerebral haemorrhage and, on July 30; our Weerth died in Havana."

I called him the first and *most important* poet of the German proletariat. Indeed, his socialist and political poems are far superior to Freiligrath's in originality, wit, and particularly in sensuous fire. He often used Heine-like forms, but clothed them with very original and personal content. And he differed from most poets in that he was completely indifferent to his poems once he wrote them. If he sent a copy of a poem to Marx or myself, he let it go at that, and it often took a great deal of persuading to have him publish it somewhere. Only during the life of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* did he behave differently. The reason why is contained in the following excerpt of a letter from Weerth to Marx (dated Hamburg, April 28, 1851):

"By the way, I hope to see you again in London at the beginning of July, for I can't stand these grasshoppers in Hamburg any longer. I am threatened here with a brilliant livelihood, but I am fearful of it. Anyone would grab it with both hands. But I'm too old to become a philistine, and beyond the ocean lies the Far West...

"I have written all sorts of things recently but have finished nothing, for I see no purpose, no end in my scribbling. When *you* write something about political economy, it has meaning and sense. But *me*? To make poor

<sup>140</sup> Charles Louis Napoleon Bonaparte (1808-73), the nephew of Napoleon I, and Emperor of France (1852-71).

<sup>141</sup> Faustin Soulouque (1782?-1867). President and then Emperor of Haiti from March 1847 to January 1859, when he was overthrown.

<sup>142</sup> Wilhelm Wolff (1809-64), German revolutionary, an editor of *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*.

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puns and bad jokes for the sake of a silly smile from our grotesque countrymen—really, I know of nothing more pitiful! My writing activity definitely broke down with the end of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*.

"I must confess: no matter how sorry I feel that I have wasted away the last three years doing nothing, I'm happy when I think of our paper in Cologne. We did *not* compromise ourselves. That's the main thing! Since Frederick the Great no one has treated the German people so sharply as we did in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*.

"I don't mean to say that this was due to me; but I was there...

"O Portugal! O Spain! (W. had just arrived from there.) If we only had your bright skies, your wine, your oranges and myrtle! But we haven't that either! Nothing but rain and long noses and smoked meat!

"In the rain and with a long nose, sincerely

G. Weerth"

There was one thing in which Weerth was unsurpassable, and here he was more masterful than Heine (because he was healthier and less artificial), and only Goethe in the German language excelled him here: that was in expressing natural robust sensuousness and the joys of the flesh. Many readers of the *Sozialdemokrat* would be horrified, were I to reprint here the individual *feuilletons* of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*. But I haven't the slightest intention of doing so. Yet, I cannot refrain from pointing out that there will come a time when German Socialists, too, will triumphantly discard the last traces of German philistine prejudices and hypocritical moral prudery—and anyhow, they only serve as a cover for surreptitious obscenity. Read Freiligrath's "Epistles", for instance—you would really think people had no sexual organs. And yet, nobody was more delighted with a quiet bit of smut than Freiligrath, who is so ultra-chaste in his poetry. It is high time that at least the German workers get accustomed to speaking in a free and easy manner as do the peoples of the Romanic lands, Homer and Plato, Horace and Juvenal,<sup>143</sup> the Old Testament, and the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, about the things they themselves do every day or night, these natural, indispensable and highly pleasurable things.

Moreover, Weerth has also written less objectionable things, and I am going to take the liberty from time to time of sending some of these pieces to the *feuilleton* of the *Sozialdemokrat*.

<sup>143</sup> Homer (8<sup>th</sup> century BC), Greek epic poet; Plato (c428-c348 BC), Greek philosopher; Horace (65-8 BC), Roman poet; Juvenal (c.55-c.140), Roman satirist.

ENGELS, Letter to Hermann Schlüter, May 15, 1885

Dear Mr. Schlüter;

As for the poems:<sup>144</sup>

The *Marseillaise* of the Peasant War was: *Eine feste Burg ist unser Gott* [*A Mighty Fortress is Our God*],<sup>145</sup> and conscious of victory as the text and melody of this song are, it cannot and need not be taken in this sense today. Other songs of the time are to be found in collections of folksongs: *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* and the like. More may perhaps be found there. But the mercenary soldier largely pre-empted our folk poetry even then.

Of foreign songs I know only the pretty Danish song of *Herr Tidmann*, which I translated in the Berlin *Social-Democrat* [No. 18, February 5, 1865] in 1865.

There were all sorts of Chartist songs, but they aren't to be had any more. One began:

*Britannia's sons, though slaves you be,  
God your creator made you free;  
To all he life and freedom gave,  
But never, never made a slave.*

I don't know any others.  
All that has vanished, nor was this poetry worth much.  
In 1848 there were two songs sung to the same melody:

1. "Schleswig-Holstein."
2. "The Hecker Song":

*Hecker, hoch dein Name schalle  
An dem ganzen deutschen Rhein.  
Deine Grossmut, ja dein Auge*

<sup>144</sup> During the period of anti-Socialist laws in Germany, a Social-Democratic press operated for the German party in Switzerland planned to issue six volumes of revolutionary poetry. Schlüter (1851-1919), for the press, wrote to Engels inquiring whether he knew about several kinds of verse desired for the project, and this was Engels' reply.

<sup>145</sup> Cf. Engels writing almost a decade earlier (see p. 53, above): "Luther ... composed the text and melody of that triumphal hymn which became the *Marseillaise* of the sixteenth century."

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*Flößen schon Vertrauen ein.  
Hecker, der als deutscher Mann  
Vor der Freiheit sterben kann.*

[Hecker, your name shall echo  
Along the whole German river Rhine  
Your unanimity, your eye alone  
Give trust.  
Hecker, who can die as a German man  
In the face of freedom.]

I think that's enough. Then the variant:

*Hecker, Struve, Blenker, Zitz und Blum,  
Bringt die deutsche Ferschte um!*

[Hecker, Struve, Blenker, Zitz and Blum,  
Kill the German rulers!]

In general, the poetry of past revolutions (the *Marseillaise* always excepted) rarely has a revolutionary effect for later times because it must also reproduce the mass prejudices of the period in order to affect the masses. Hence the religious nonsense even among the Chartists...

Yours,  
F. Engels

# The Expression and Endurance of Fundamental Human Values

MARX, from *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*

It will be seen how the history of *industry* and the established *objective* existence of industry are the *open* book of *man's essential powers*, the exposure to the senses of human *psychology*. Hitherto this was not conceived in its inseparable connection with man's *essential being*, but only in an external relation of utility, because, moving in the realm of estrangement, people could only think man's general mode of being—religion or history in its abstract-general character as politics, art, literature, etc.,—to be the reality of man's essential powers and man's *species-activity*. We have before us the *objectified essential powers* of man in the form of *sensuous, alien, useful objects*, in the form of estrangement, displayed in *ordinary material industry* (which can be conceived as a part of that general movement, just as that movement can be conceived as a particular part of industry, since all human activity hitherto has been labour—that is, industry—activity estranged from itself).

A *psychology* for which this, the part of history most contemporary and accessible to sense, remains a closed book, cannot become a genuine, comprehensive and *real* science. What indeed are we to think of a science which *airily* abstracts from this large part of human labour and which fails to feel its own incompleteness, while such a wealth of human endeavour unfolded before it means nothing more to it than, perhaps, what can be expressed in one word—"need", "*vulgar need*"?

The *natural sciences* have developed an enormous activity and have accumulated a constantly growing mass of material. Philosophy, however, has remained just as alien to them as they remain to philosophy. Their momentary unity was only a *chimerical illusion*. The will was there, but the means were lacking. Even historiography pays regard to natural science only occasionally, as a factor of enlightenment and utility arising from individual great discoveries. But natural science has invaded and transformed human life all the more *practically* through the medium of industry; and has prepared human emancipation, however directly and much it had to consummate dehumanization. *Industry* is the actual, historical relation of nature, and therefore of natural science, to man. If, therefore, industry is conceived as the *exoteric* revelation of man's *essential powers*, we also gain an understanding of the *human essence* of nature or the *natural* essence of man. In consequence, natural science will lose its abstractly material—or, rather, its idealistic—tendency, and will become the basis of *human* science, as it has already become the basis of actual human life, albeit in an estranged form. *One* basis for life and

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another basis for *science* is *a priori* a lie. The nature which comes to be in human history—the genesis of human society—is man's *real* nature; hence nature as it comes to be through industry, even though in an *estranged* form, is true *anthropological* nature.

**MARX, from *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844***

In order to abolish the *idea* of private property, the *idea* of communism is completely sufficient. It takes *actual* communist action to abolish actual private property. History will come to it; and this movement, which in *theory* we already know to be self-transcending movement, will constitute in *actual fact* a very severe and protracted process. But we must regard it as a real advance to have gained beforehand a consciousness of the limited character as well as of the goal of this historical movement—and a consciousness which reaches out beyond it.

When communist *workmen* associate with one another, theory, propaganda, etc., is their first end. But at the same time, as a result of this association, they acquire a new need—the need for society—and what appears as a means becomes an end. You can observe this practical process in its most splendid results whenever you see French socialist workers together. Such things as smoking, drinking, eating, etc., are no longer means of contact or means that bring together. Company, association, and conversation, which again has society as its end, are enough for them; the brotherhood of man is no mere phrase with them, but a fact of life, and the nobility of man shines upon us from their work-hardened bodies.

**MARX, from *The Holy Family* (1845)**

We come across Marie surrounded by criminals, a prostitute, a servant of the proprietress of a criminals' tavern. In this debasement she preserves a human nobleness of soul, a human unaffectedness, and a human beauty that impress those around her, raise her to the level of a poetical flower of the criminal world, and win for her the name of *Fleur de Marie*.

We must observe *Fleur de Marie* attentively from her first appearance in order to be able to compare her *original form* with her *critical transformation*.<sup>146</sup>

<sup>146</sup> Again, the novel *The Mysteries of Paris* by Sue is the reference, in which *Fleur de Marie* appears as a major figure. Sue and his Young Hegelian "Critical" critic Szeliga are



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In spite of her frailty *Fleur de Marie* shows great vitality, energy, cheerfulness, elasticity of character—qualities which alone explain her human development in her *inhuman* situation....

*Good and evil*, in Marie's mind, are not the moral *abstractions* of good and evil. She is *good* because she has never caused *suffering* to anybody, she has always been *human* towards her inhuman surroundings. She is *good* because the sun and the flowers reveal to her her own sunny and blossoming nature. She is *good* because she is still *young*, full of hope and vitality. Her situation is *not good* because it does her unnatural violence, because it is not the expression of her human impulses, the fulfilment of her human desires; because it is full of torment and void of pleasure. She measures her situation in life by her *own individuality*, her *natural* essence, not by the *ideal of good*.

In *natural* surroundings the chains of bourgeois life fall off *Fleur de Marie*; she can freely manifest her own nature and consequently is bubbling with love of life, with a wealth of feeling with human joy at the beauty of nature; these show that the bourgeois system has only grazed the surface of her and is a mere misfortune, that she herself is neither good nor bad, but *human*...

So far we have seen *Fleur de Marie* in her original un-critical form. Eugène Sue has here risen above the horizon of his own narrow world outlook. He has slapped bourgeois prejudice in the face. He will hand over *Fleur de Marie* to the hero Rudolph to make up for his own rashness and to reap applause from all old men and women, from the whole of the Paris police, from the current religion and from "Critical Criticism"...

In her unhappy situation in life she was able to become a lovable, human individual; in her exterior debasement she was conscious that *her human* essence was *her true essence*. Now the filth of modern society which has come into exterior contact with her becomes her innermost being; continual hypochondriac self-torture because of that filth will be her duty, the task of her life appointed by God himself, the self-aim of her existence.

### MARX, from *Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy* (1857) (draft)

6. *The unequal relation between the development of material production and e.g., artistic production.* On the whole, conception of progress should

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both regarded as warping a true portrait of this human type by their speculative commentaries.

not be accepted in the abstraction. Modern art, etc. It is not as important and difficult to grasp this disproportion as that within practical social relations, e.g., the relation between education in the United States and Europe. The really difficult point to be discussed here, however, concerns how the productive relations come forward as legal relations in an unequal development. e.g., thus the relation between Roman civil law (this is less true of criminal and public law) and modern production.

7. *This conception of development appears to imply necessity.* On the other hand, justification of accident. *Varia.* (Freedom and other points.) (The effect of means of communication. World history did not always exist; history as a consequence of world history.)

8. *The starting point is of course in certain facts of nature; subjective and objective.* Clans, races, etc.

It is well known that certain periods of highest development of art stand in no direct connection with the general development of society, nor with the material basis and skeleton structure of its organization. Witness the example of the Greeks as compared with modern art or even Shakespeare. As concerns certain forms of art, e.g., the epos,<sup>147</sup> it is acknowledged that as soon as the production of art as such appears they can never be produced in their epoch-making, classical aspect; and accordingly, that in the domain of art certain of its important forms are possible only at an undeveloped stage of art development. If that is true of the mutual relations of different modes of art within the domain art itself, it is far less surprising that the same is true of the relations of art as a whole to the general development of society. The difficulty lies only in the general formulation of these contradictions. No sooner are they made specific than they are clarified.

Let us take for instance the relationship of Greek art and then Shakespeare's to the present. It is a well known fact that Greek mythology was not only the arsenal of Greek art but also the very ground from which it had sprung. Is the view of nature and of social relations which shaped Greek imagination and thus Greek [mythology] possible in the age of automatic machinery and railways and locomotives and electric telegraphs? Where does Vulcan come in as against Roberts & Co., Jupiter as against the lightning rod, and Hermes as against the *Crédit Mobilier*?<sup>148</sup> All mythology masters and dominates and shapes the forces of nature in and through the imagination; hence it disappears as soon as man gains

<sup>147</sup> i.e. a body of poetry which conveys the tradition of a people, sometimes simply used as another word for "epic".

<sup>148</sup> Hermes was the messenger of the Gods in Greek mythology; Vulcan the god of fire in Roman mythology (and son of Jupiter, highest of the Roman gods). The *Crédit Mobilier* was an investment structure introduced in post-1848 France.

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mastery over the forces of nature. What becomes of the Goddess Fame side by side with Printing House Square?<sup>149</sup> Greek art presupposes the existence of Greek mythology, i.e., that nature and even the forms of society itself are worked up in the popular imagination in an unconsciously artistic fashion. That is its material. Not, however, any mythology taken at random, nor any accidental unconsciously artistic elaboration of nature (including with the latter everything objective, hence society too). Egyptian mythology could never be the soil or the womb which would give birth to Greek art. But in any event [there had to be] a mythology. There could be no social development which excludes all mythological relation to nature, all mythologizing relation to it, and which accordingly claims from the artist an imagination free of mythology.

Looking at it from another side: is Achilles<sup>150</sup> possible where there are powder and lead? Or is the *Iliad* at all possible in a time of the hand-operated or the later steam press?<sup>151</sup> Are not singing and reciting and the muse necessarily put out of existence by the printer's bar; and do not necessary prerequisites of epic poetry accordingly vanish?

But the difficulty does not lie in understanding that the Greek art and epos are bound up with certain forms of social development. It rather lies in understanding why they will afford us aesthetic enjoyment and in certain respects prevail as the standard and model beyond attainment.

A man cannot become a child again unless he becomes childish. But doesn't he enjoy the naïve ways of the child, and mustn't he himself strive to reproduce its truth again at a higher stage? Isn't the character of every epoch revived perfectly true to nature in child nature? Why should the historical childhood of humanity, where it had obtained its most beautiful development, not exert an eternal charm as an age that will never return? There are ill-bred children and precocious children. Many of the ancient peoples belong to these categories. But the Greeks were normal children. The charm their art has for us does not stand in contradiction with the undeveloped stage of the social order from which it had sprung. It is much more the result of the latter, and inseparately connected with the circumstance that the unripe social conditions under which the art arose and under which alone it could appear can never return.

<sup>149</sup> The Goddess Fama (meaning "rumour") represented fame and renown in Roman mythology; Printing House Square (so called because it once housed the King's printing house) was in Blackfriars, City of London. Marx probably has *The Times* newspaper in mind: it was printed there from 1785 until 1974.

<sup>150</sup> Hero of the Trojan War and of Homer's *Iliad*.

<sup>151</sup> Achilles is the warrior-hero of Homer's epic poem.

## Form and Style

ENGELS, from Letter to Wilhelm Gräber, October 8, 1839

I devote myself at present to the modern style which, without doubt is of all stylistics the ideal.<sup>152</sup> Its model can be found in the writings of Heine, and especially in those of Kühne and Gutzkow. Its master, however, is Wienbarg. Earlier Lessing, Goethe, Jean Paul and above all Börne contributed elements that have had an especially favourable effect upon it. The style of Börne, ah, that surpasses all! *Menzel, der Franzosenfresser* is stylistically the best of all German works and is additionally the first one to destroy an author completely when it was important to do so. It has been banned in Germany again so that one will have to follow a mediocre style as is practiced in the royal bureaus. The modern style combines the best of all styles in itself: terse conciseness and pregnancy which hits its mark with a *single* word, alternating with epic, calm description; simple speech, alternating with scintillating images and glittering sparks of wit, a strong youthful Ganymede, roses wound round his head and the weapon in hand that slew the python.<sup>153</sup> Thus, too, the individuality of the author is given greatest latitude, so that, in spite of the affinity, no one is the imitator of another. Heine writes dazzlingly. Wienbarg cheerfully warm and beaming. Gutzkow with a razor-sharp accuracy that carries, at times, a welcome beam of sunshine; Kühne writes goodheartedly and descriptively, with perhaps too much light and too little shadow; Laube imitates Heine and Goethe, too, but preposterously, since he imitates the Goethean Varnhagen, copied likewise by Mundt. Marggraf is still inclined to generalize with his cheeks full, but that will stop, and the prose of Beck has not yet gotten beyond the stage of studies.—If the ornate style of Jean Paul is united with Börne's precision, you have the basic traits of the modern style. Gutzkow was fortunate enough to know how to absorb the brilliant, nimble yet dry style of the French. This French style is like a gossamer web; the German modern is a silken flock. (This image misses

<sup>152</sup> The nineteen year old Engels wrote his study of style as a letter to a childhood friend, Wilhelm Gräber (1820-95). At the time he was hopeful of following in the steps of literary authors in the "modern style". Karl Ludwig Borne (1786-1837), Karl Ferdinand Gutzkow (1811-78), Ferdinand Gustav Kühne (1806-88), Heinrich Laube (1806-84), Ludolf Wienbarg (1802-72) and Theodor Mundt (1808-61) belonged to the "Young Germany" movement which influenced young Engels' world view. Karl August von Ense Varnhagen (1785-1858) was an eminent liberal critic, biographer and historian, friendly to this movement. Jean Paul (the pseudonym of Johann Paul Friedrich Richter) (1763-1825) was a famous Romantic writer, one of the exponents of *Romantische Ironie*. Other writers named here include Hermann Marggraf (1809-64) and Karl Isidor Beck (1817-79).

<sup>153</sup> Ganymede was a beautiful Trojan youth in Greek mythology. The killing of the python is usually attributed to Apollo.

its mark, I fear.) That I nonetheless do not ignore the old in pursuit of the new is shown by my studies of the inspired songs by Goethe. They must be studied for their musical character, which is best done as set to music by various hands.

### MARX, from Letter to Frederick Engels, October 26, 1854

I have come back to the worthy Chateaubriand,<sup>154</sup> this *belletrist*, who in the most objectionable fashion combines the eighteenth century's elegant scepticism and Voltairianism with the elegant sentimentalism and romanticism of the nineteenth century. Of course, in France this combination had to prove epoch-making *stylistically*, although its artificiality even in style hits you in the eye despite the neat artistic stratagems. As far as this fellow is concerned *politically*, he revealed himself completely in his *Congrès de Vérone* [1838] and the only question still uncertain is whether he "accepted cash" from Alexander Pavlovitch,<sup>155</sup> or whether this foolish fop was simply bought by flattery which he cannot at all resist. In any event, he received the Order of St. Andrew from Petersburg. The *vanitas* peeps from every pore of M. Le "Vicomte" (?), despite his coquettish, sometimes Mephistophelean and sometimes Christian, continual play with the *vanitatum vanitas* [vanity of vanities]. You know that at the time of the Congress [1822] Villèle<sup>156</sup> was prime minister under Louis XVIII<sup>157</sup>, and Chateaubriand the French emissary to Verona. In his *Congrès de Vérone*—perhaps you read it at one time—he reports on the proceedings and decisions, etc. It begins with a short history of the Spanish Revolution of 1820-23. As concerns this "history", it's enough to take note that he misplaces Madrid on the Tajo<sup>158</sup>

<sup>154</sup> François-René vicomte de Chateaubriand (1768-1848), French author, statesman and diplomat, was French foreign minister for two years after the 1822 Congress of Verona. Further comment on Chateaubriand's style appears in a letter from Marx to Engels of November 30, 1873: "I have read Saint-Beuve's book on *Chateaubriand*, a writer who has always been repugnant to me. If the man has grown so famous in France, it is because he is the most classic incarnation of French *vanité* in every regard, and this *vanité* not in a light, frivolous eighteenth-century raiment, but priding itself on Romantic garb and the very latest turns of phrase. The false profundity, Byzantine exaggeration, emotional coquetry, play of motley iridescence, word painting, theatrical, sublime—in one word, in form and content a never-before-seen mishmash of lies."

<sup>155</sup> Then the Tsar of Russia.

<sup>156</sup> Jean-Baptiste Guillaume Joseph comte de Villèle (1773-1854), French premier 1822-8.

<sup>157</sup> King of France from 1814 until his death in 1824 except for the "hundred days" when Napoleon returned in 1815.

<sup>158</sup> The Tajo, or Tagus, river rises in eastern Spain and has its estuary at Lisbon, in Portugal.

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(just to bring in the Spanish saying that this river *cria oro* [hatches forth gold]), and that in his recounting, Riego leading 10,000 men (in fact there were 5,000) attacked General Freyre, who led 13,000; after his defeat, Riego then retreated with 15,000 men. He has him withdraw to the Sierra Morena rather than the Sierra de Ronda, in order to compare him with the hero of La Mancha.<sup>159</sup> I mention this *en passant* to characterize his manner. Scarcely any data correct.

M. Chateaubriand's deeds at the Congress of Verona provide, however, the best joke; after it ended, he became minister of foreign affairs and conducted the military invasion of Spain...

**MARX, from Letter to Ferdinand Lassalle, April 19, 1859<sup>160</sup>**

I come now to *Franz von Sickingen*. First I must praise the composition and the action, which is more than one can say for any other modern German drama. In the second instance, and laying aside any purely critical relation to the work, it affected me strongly on the first reading, and so, it will have an even stronger effect on readers who are more emotionally disposed. And this is a second very important aspect. Now the other side of the medal: first of all—a purely formal concern—since you have written in verse, you could have worked on your iambics somewhat more artistically. However, irrespective of how shocking this carelessness will be to the *poets by profession*, I consider this an advantage since our spawn of poetical epigones have nothing left to offer but formal polish.

**ENGELS, from Letter to Ferdinand Lassalle, May 18, 1859**

Dear Lassalle:

You are probably somewhat surprised that I have not written you for so long, especially as I owe you my opinion of *Sickingen*. But it was just this that has delayed me so long. With the drought of fine literature which now prevails everywhere, I seldom read such works, and it has been years since I last read one of them with the purpose of giving a thorough judgment, a definite substantiated opinion. The usual trash is not worth it. Even the few fairly good English novels which I still read from time to time, like Thackeray's for instance, have not been able to interest me to

<sup>159</sup> i.e. Don Quixote, the hero of Cervantes' novel.

<sup>160</sup> The major portions of this and the following letter are reproduced in the section "The Problem of Realism".

## Form and Style

this extent even once, although they undoubtedly have a literary and cultural-historical significance. But due to such a long lack of exercise, my critical faculties have grown dull, and I must take considerable time before I can give a definite opinion. Your *Sickingen* deserves a different attitude than those literary products, and so I did not grudge it the time. The first and second reading of your—in every sense, both as to theme and treatment—national German drama, emotionally affected me so strongly that I was compelled to put it aside for a while; the more so since my taste, crudened by these days of literary poverty, has brought me to such a state (I confess it, to my shame) that even things of slight value may at times make some impression on me at *first* reading. So, in order to achieve a wholly nonpartisan, perfectly “critical” attitude, I put *Sickingen* aside, i.e. lent it to some acquaintances (there are still a few Germans here more or less educated in literature). *Habent sua fata libelli* [books have their fate]—if you lend them, they seldom return, and so I had to obtain the return of my *Sickingen* by force. I can tell you that after a third and fourth reading my impression has remained the same, and being certain that your *Sickingen* can stand criticism, I am now going to apply the “acid test”.

I know it will be no great compliment to say that not one of the official poets of Germany today is even remotely capable of writing such a drama. But it is a fact, and one too characteristic of our literature to pass by in silence. First, let me discuss the formal side. Here I must note that I was most pleasantly surprised by the skilful handling of the knots and the thoroughly dramatic character of the play. To be sure you have allowed yourself many liberties in the versification which however are more troublesome in reading than on the stage. I should have liked to read the stage adaptation; as the play stands, it certainly could not be staged. I was visited by a young German poet (Karl Siebel),<sup>161</sup> a countryman and distant relative, who has worked a good deal in the theatre; as a reservist of the Prussian guard, he perhaps will be in Berlin, so I may take the liberty of having him bring you a note. He has a very high opinion of your drama, but thinks it entirely impossible to stage on account of the long monologues which provide for only one actor to do something while the others would have exhausted their supply of mimicry two and three times over not to stand there like part of the scenery. The last two acts prove that you could make the dialogue vivacious and quick without difficulty, and with the exception of several scenes (which happens in every play), this could be done in the first three acts also. So I have no doubt that in preparing your play for the stage, you will have taken this into

<sup>161</sup> Karl Siebel (1836-68), German poet.

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consideration. The *intellectual content* must, of course, suffer from this, as is inevitable, and the perfect fusion of the greater intellectual depth, of conscious historical content, with which you justly credit German drama, with Shakespearian vivacity and wealth of action will probably be achieved only in the future and perhaps not by Germans. It is truly in this fusion that I see the future of the drama. Your *Sickingen* is wholly on the right track; the principal characters *are* representatives of distinct classes and tendencies and hence definite ideas of their time, and the motives of their actions are to be found not in trivial individual desires but in the historical stream upon which they are carried. However, the next step forward should be in making these motives emerge to the foreground in a more lively, active, as it were natural way from the course of action itself, on the other hand making the argumentative speeches (in which, by the way, I recognize with pleasure your old oratorical talents from the courts of justice and the popular assembly) less and less necessary. You, too, seem to recognize this as the ideal aim, while establishing the difference between a stage play and a literary play; I think *Sickingen* could, even though with difficulty (because to achieve perfection is not so simple), be made over into a stage play in this sense. The characterization of the persons is connected to this. You quite justly object to the *poor* individualization which prevails at present, which has about as much consistency as a cunning modest diarrhoea and is a fundamental symptom of an epigone literature expiring onto the sand. It seems to me, however, that the person is characterized not only by *what* he does but also by *how* he does it; and from this point of view, I do not think it would have harmed the intellectual content of your drama if the individual characters had been more sharply differentiated and their mutual oppositions brought out. The characteristics which sufficed in *antiquity* are no longer adequate in our age, and in this, it seems to me, you could have paid more attention to the significance of Shakespeare in the history of the development of the drama without damaging your own work. But these are secondary matters, and I only mention them so that you may see that I have also given some thought to the formal aspects of your play.

**MARX, from Letter to J.B. Schweitzer,<sup>162</sup> January 24, 1865**

[Proudhon's] first work, *What is Property?*, is by all means his best work. It is epoch-making, if not for the newness of its content, then at least for

<sup>162</sup> Johann Baptist Schweitzer (1833-75), editor of *Sozialdemokrat* (1864-7), a Lassalle-inspired German political figure).



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the new and audacious way in which old things are said...

In Proudhon's book [of 1840] there still prevails, if I may be allowed the expression, a strong muscular style. And its style is in my opinion its chief merit. One sees that even where he is only reproducing old stuff, Proudhon makes independent discoveries; that what he is saying was new to him himself and ranks as new. Provocative defiance, laying hands on the economic "holy of holies", superb paradox which makes a mock of bourgeois common sense, withering criticism, bitter irony, and, betrayed here and there, a deep and genuine feeling of indignation at the infamy of what exists, revolutionary earnestness—because of all this *What Is Property?* had an electrifying effect and made a great impression on its first appearance. In a strictly scientific history of political economy the book would hardly be worth mentioning. But sensation works of this kind play their part in the sciences just as much as in polite literature...

In *The Philosophy of Poverty* [1846] all the defects of Proudhon's method of presentation stand out very unfavourably in comparison with *What Is Property?* The style is often what the French call *ampoulé* [bombastic]. High-sounding speculative jargon, supposed to be German-philosophical, appears regularly on the scene when his Gallic acumen fails him. A puffing, self-glorifying, boastful tone, and especially the twaddle about "*science*" and the sham display of it, which are always so unedifying, continually explode in one's ears. Instead of the genuine warmth which glowed in his first piece of writing, certain passages here are systematically and rhetorically worked up into a momentary fever.

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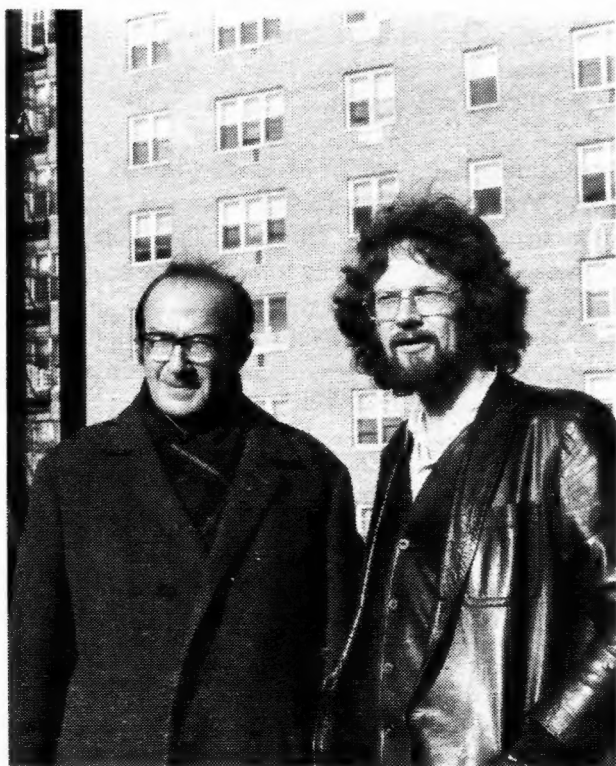
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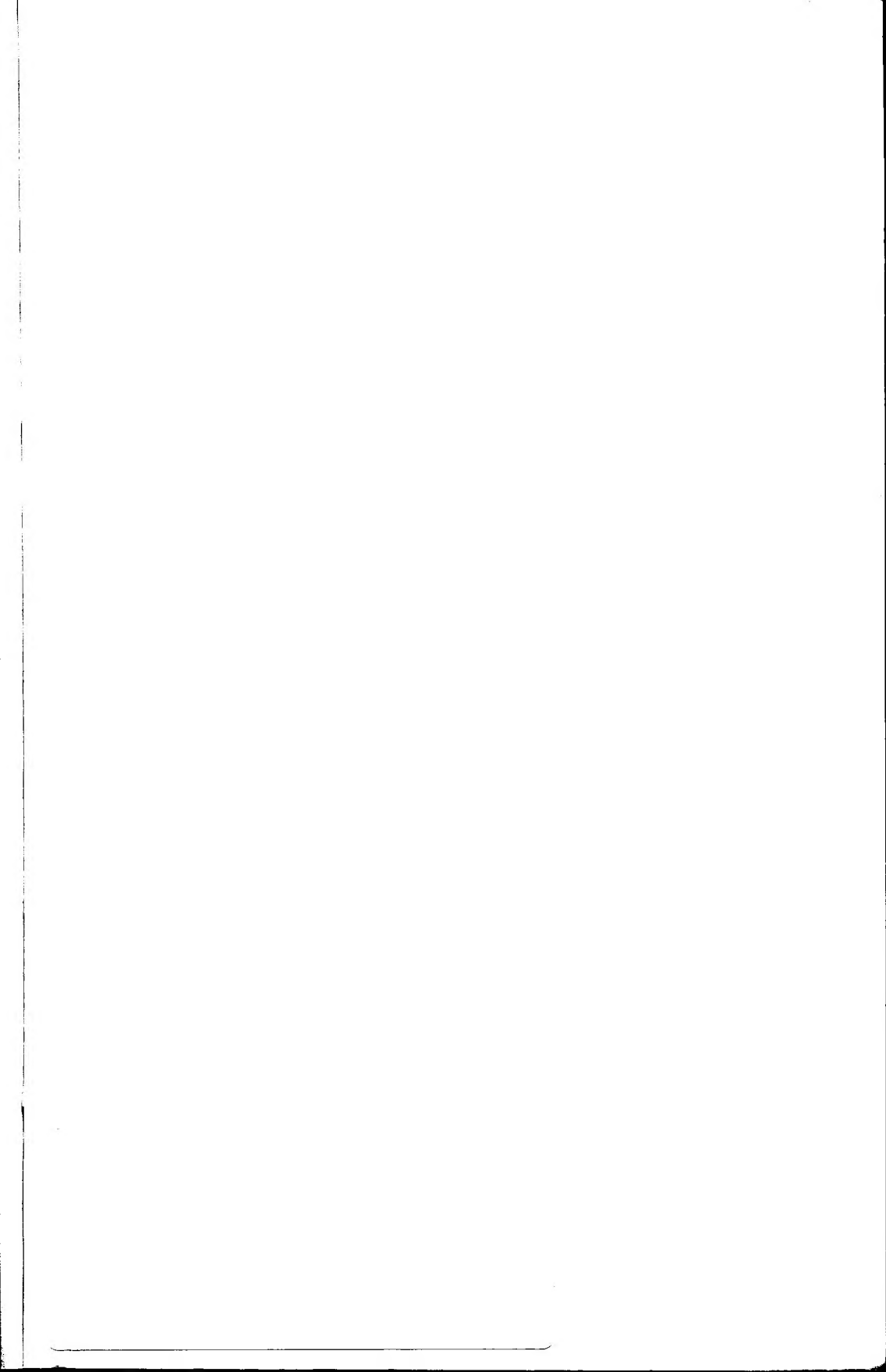
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Documents on Marxist Aesthetics (DOMA) was initially planned by Lee Baxandall and Stefan Morawski in the 1960s as a twelve-volume series whose purpose was to document and analyse the achievements and evolution of Marxist thought on literature, drama and art during its period of classical development from Marx and Engels in the mid-nineteenth century through its major representatives in England, France, Germany, Holland, the USSR and the USA until 1925.

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